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**NATURAL HAIR VLOGGING: A THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF
DISCRIMINATION AND BIAS IN THE INDUSTRY**

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by

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Abstract

Increasingly, Black women are transitioning from wearing their hair straight to embracing their natural hair texture and are actively seeking and engaging social media for Black haircare education. This study invokes both critical race theory and feminist theory to explore the experiences of Black female natural hair vloggers. Although previous research on natural hair vloggers shows that natural hair vlogs uplift and empower Black women by offering Black women an online communal space to resist Western beauty standards, I argue that natural hair vlogs are still sites of discrimination because of institutionalized racism and colorism. This study investigates the different forms of discrimination and bias Black female natural hair vloggers experience due to their race and hair texture. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 Black female natural hair vloggers. A thematic analysis was used to analyze the data collected from these interviews. Findings show that Black women experience three forms of discrimination and bias within the natural hair vlogging industry. Findings also indicate that Black female natural hair vloggers internalize these painful discriminatory practices and biases, and it is reflected in their descriptions of themselves and other Black women with natural hair. Recommendations are made for strategies that vloggers can use to challenge the racism and colorism in the industry, enhance their success as vloggers, and move forward in creating a safe space for Black women online.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In 2010, I became one of the many Black women who began transitioning from chemically straightened hair to embracing wearing my own natural hair texture. For me, the decision was simple. My hair stylist at the time suggested that my hair would do well without a chemical relaxer, so I made the decision to transition. However, I was not prepared for the emotional element of transitioning between hair textures. I spent a lot of time relearning the characteristics of my hair and how to care for it. Much of my reeducation about hair care came from social media personalities on the internet who were using the medium to document their hair journeys. Despite my own hair journey, it was not until the second year of my doctoral program, after a conversation with a childhood friend, who is a natural hair vlogger, that I began to think of the natural hair vlogging community as an industry with abundant monetary value and opportunity for career growth.

With a background interest in race and labor, I wondered what impact racism and colorism may have on the Black women in this virtual work environment who helped me redefine my relationship with my own hair. It was in this moment that I decided to focus my doctoral dissertation research on the experiences of Black female natural hair vloggers. The purpose of this qualitative dissertation is to understand the forms of discrimination and biases Black female natural hair vloggers experience in the natural hair vlogging industry and how racism and colorism are discursively constructed when vloggers describe their physical characteristics and other Black women with natural hair. I build on studies that examine how Black women experience discrimination and bias throughout multiple aspects of their lives, including in the workplace, schools, and on the internet (Asmelash, 2020; Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2003; Powell, 2018). In the most general terms, this dissertation tells the story of

how Black women have been and continue to be discriminated against based on race and gender (Asmelash, 2020; Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2003; Dawson et al., 2019; Griffin, 2019; Onwuachi-Willig, 2010; Powell, 2018; Shulman, 1996). Taking an intersectional approach of critical race theory and feminist theory, I explore how the dynamics of racism and colorism continue, more specifically, in the natural hair vlogging industry. Although previous research on natural hair vloggers shows that natural hair vlogs uplift and empower Black women by offering Black women an online communal space to resist Western beauty standards (Sobande, 2017), I argue that natural hair vlogs are still sites of discrimination because of institutionalized racism and colorism. While some states have established workplace discrimination laws to prevent individuals from being discriminated against based on their hair texture and style of hair, Black women continue to face discrimination because of their natural hair texture and hairstyles. This study explores how this dynamic endures in a virtual work environment that is built around Black hair.

Study Background

Although more Black women are wearing their natural hair textures, western beauty standards of hair are reinforced using multiple methods. Various forms of media promote Eurocentric hair textures and styles as the norm and standard of beauty and acceptance (Asakitikpi & Choene, 2019; Dawson et al., 2019; White, 2005). This standard is evident in many segments of society. For example, some schools ban students from wearing natural hairstyles (Asmelash, 2020; Griffin, 2019; Perry, 2019), and the military forbids Black women from wearing certain natural hairstyles (Smith, 2018). Black women still face natural hair texture bias and discrimination in the workplace and education establishments (Dawson et al., 2019; Griffin, 2019; Onwuachi-Willig, 2010). Laws preventing Black men from being discriminated

against in the workplace, school, and military because of their hair have not kept up with this shift in Black hair texture acceptance. In most states, it is still legal to discriminate against people because of their natural hair. In 2020, only four states, California, New York, New Jersey, and Virginia, had passed bills into law based on the CROWN Act— Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair—which ban discrimination based on hair in the workplace (Guzman & Hamedy, 2020; Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair (CROWN) Act, H.R. 5309, 2019).

Even in the states where laws have been passed to prevent discrimination in the workplace based on hair, these laws have no clear jurisdiction over the vlogging industry given the legal ambiguities and geographic decentralization of the internet. However, vlogging is a career for many in this industry and has been significant in shaping the natural hair community in recent years (Alston & Ellis-Hervey, 2015; McLean, 2015; Norwood, 2018; Phelps-Ward & Laura, 2016; Sobande, 2017).

It is important to understand how Black women in this virtual workplace environment experience bias and discriminatory practices, and how they express these experiences. Sales data of Black hair products indicates an increase in the number of Black women transitioning from chemically straightened hair to wearing their own natural hair texture (Mintel Group, 2017). Many of these women actively seek and engage with social media for Black haircare education to learn how to care for and maintain their natural hair textures. This study examines if an industry that is known for encouraging Black women to embrace their own natural hair textures is also a site of discriminatory practices fueled by colorism and racism.

Statement of Problem

YouTube has become a key part of many brands' marketing strategies (Dehghani et al., 2016). One YouTube marketing tactic is to create partnerships with vloggers. In this partnership, vloggers upload video blogs inviting viewers into their personal lives while also featuring brands and products during the videos (Liu et al., 2019). In a study conducted to examine the influence vloggers have on luxury beauty brands, Lee and Watkins (2016) found that beauty product consumers who are exposed to vloggers' evaluation of luxury beauty brands may have an increased positive level of perception of the brand than people who are not exposed to these types of vlogs. However, it is not just luxury beauty brands that benefit from the influence of vloggers. Black women primarily seek natural haircare education and product recommendations from vloggers and other social media influencers online (Mintel Group, 2017).

While extensive research has been conducted to better understand the relationship between consumer behavior and influencer marketing (Chopra et al., 2020; Hikmawati, 2019; Johnstone & Lindh, 2018; Kádeková & Holienčinová, 2018; Młodkowska, 2019; Stubb & Colliander, 2019), less research has been conducted to fully understand the dynamics of racism, colorism, and sexism in influencer marketing and what forms of discrimination and biases vloggers within certain industries may experience, and how they articulate those experiences. Hierarchies of race and hair texture have existed since slavery (Morrow, 1973); the digital era are still embedded in these hierarchies. It is important to understand not only if these hierarchies exist in an industry that was created and is driven by Black women, but how these hierarchies are intertwined in Black women's employment opportunities, compensation, and the way these women view themselves given the larger context of social and racial inequities.

Research on beauty vloggers often focuses on the group as a homogenous population without attention to race (Berryman & Kavka, 2017; Hikmawati, 2019; Mardon et al., 2018).

Other times research on beauty vloggers considers gender or ethnic demographics but with little engagement on the racism in the virtual workplace environments of beauty vloggers (Niel & Mbilishaka, 2019; Sobande, 2017). While gender-based and research focusing on socio-cultural variables is imperative to understanding labor and discrimination within the vlogging industry, we must also acknowledge that factors of discrimination do not affect or are understood by all workers—no matter the industry—equally.

Previous research has highlighted inequalities within YouTube's algorithm that affects the order of visibility in which vloggers appear to viewers; however, the historical context of discrimination is absent in the research on beauty vlogging (Bishop, 2018). Many institutional discriminatory practices were put into place during the civil rights era to keep women and ethnic minorities from climbing the ladder in their careers (Shulman, 1996). This study seeks to understand how vloggers describe discriminatory practices and biases that exist against Black women with natural hair in the vlogging industry, how these discriminatory practices function, who are the gatekeepers within this industry, and their own views of the that these practices had on Black women in the vlogging industry.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand how Black female natural hair vloggers describe their experiences of personal bias and institutional discrimination from channel viewers and hair care brands on the basis of race, hair texture, and gender. While Black female natural hair vloggers do offer a space of resistance against Western beauty standards and create community for Black women with natural hair textures, I argue that this resistance may still occur in an environment of discrimination; the discrimination that these vloggers face should be explored and understood.

To understand the biases and discrimination these vloggers may encounter, I conducted 10 in-depth semi-structured interviews with Black female natural hair vloggers in the United States and analyzed their discursive articulations of their experiences using a feminist framework and a critical race framework. Vloggers included in the study represented different stages of success in the natural hair vlogging industry based on their number of YouTube subscribers. Although previous research has found that some Black women became beauty vloggers as an act of resistance against Western beauty standards (Sobande, 2017), others have also highlighted the inequitable labor relations that occur in the digital environment (Duffy, 2016). This study does not examine the relationship between Black female natural hair vloggers and capitalistic ideologies that have previously been identified, but instead focuses on the forms of bias and discrimination experienced and the way vloggers discursively articulate discrimination on Black female natural hair vloggers.

Theoretical Framework

Black female natural hair vloggers' intersecting identities play a large role in their experience as vloggers. This study used both feminist theory and critical race theory to conduct a thematic analysis of in-depth semi-structured interviews. Both theoretical frameworks allowed me to acknowledge the intersecting gendered and racial identities of the participants and acknowledge the impact that their identities as Black women may have had on their experiences.

When the conception of the term "feminist" was first coined in the 1800s during the women's suffrage movement, much of the liberation efforts focused on women's lack of civil rights, mainly the right to vote (Butler, 2013). Although abolition activism can also be contributed as part of these women's work, the first women's movement was not a movement for all women and excluded women of certain ethnic, racial, sexual orientation, and religious groups

(Steeves, 1987). The differences in these identities have led to different ideologies around feminism.

Feminism consists of multiple perspectives, which include radical, post-feminism, liberal, intersectional feminism, Black feminism, socialist, and psychoanalytic (Butler, 2013; Collins, 2000; Hoagland & Penelope, 1988; hooks, 1992; Mulvey 1973; Steeves, 1987). With a feminist framework, Corman and Luxton (2001) argue that labor is gendered. Wajcman (1991) extends that argument to technology. Duffy (2017) narrows that argument even further to highlight the aspirational work in social media performed by women. She argues that the labor performed by these women continues to regurgitate “heteronormative standards of beauty” and capitalist ideologies (Duffy, 2015, p. 454). Other social inequities are also strongly embedded in this context of digital technology. Research on digital production should include intersectionalities of gender with race, sexuality, class, and ability (Duffy, 2015).

Third-wave perspectives of feminism seem to do better than first- and second-wave feminisms at engaging with intersecting identities (Iromuanya, 2018). This wave of feminism was developed to address the lack of racial and socioeconomic status diversity that had been previously omitted from feminist movements (Butler, 2013). However, to ensure that race and power dynamics are fully engaged in this study, I am also applying a critical race theoretical framework in this study’s analysis.

When research is conducted through a critical race theoretical framework, a lens of “race, racism, and power” is applied to examine society, experiences, and events (Delgado et al., 2017, p. 3). By applying this additional framework to a study on the natural hair vlogging industry, I bring into context the historical perspectives of the tension that has existed around Black hair and women since slavery (Byrd & Tharps, 2001). During slavery, hierarchies of hair textures were

used to assign enslaved Black people duties to complete (Morrow, 1973). Using a critical race framework allows me to understand how race impacts the natural hair vlogging industry.

Research Questions

Research questions are created by researchers as a framework to address a phenomenon or explain a scenario with their research study (Morris, 2015). In qualitative studies, research questions serve as a guide in developing the interview protocol and procedures. To better understand the personal bias and discrimination that Black female natural hair vloggers experience, this study answers the following research questions.

1. How do Black female natural hair vloggers describe the forms of bias and discrimination that they Black female natural hair vloggers experience?
2. How are themes of racism and colorism embedded in the ways Black female natural hair vloggers describe themselves and other Black women with natural hair?
3. What strategies can be used to challenge the racism and colorism that Black female natural hair vloggers describe?

While a feminist framework has frequently been invoked when studying beauty vloggers and the vlogging industry (Duffy, 2015; Sobande, 2013), these research questions specifically include an intersectional framework of race and gender to understand the impact that intersecting gendered and racial identities have on Black female natural hair vloggers. To better understand how racialized ideologies affect Black women, this study directly engages with Black feminism to examine standards of beauty portrayed in digital spaces (Collins, 1990; hooks, 1992).

Definition of Terms

The following terms are discussed throughout the study and are defined below to provide context to the study (presented in alphabetical order).

Chemical hair relaxer: A chemical application primarily used by Black women that is applied to hair, which is used to permanently straighten curly, kinky, or coiled hair textures and (Shetty et al., 2013).

Colorism: When “disadvantages or advantages” occur based on the light or dark tone of someone's skin complexion and other external physical features of individuals of the same race or ethnic group (Keith & Monroe, 2016). People with Eurocentric physical features such as lighter skin complexions are awarded specific status and privilege based on these features. This hierarchy originated from European colonization and White supremacy (Dixon & Telles, 2017).

Curly hair texture: Loose curls that fall between the wavy hair texture and kinky hair texture (Walker, 1998).

Discrimination: Treating some less favorably than someone else based on race, ethnicity, age, gender identity, religion, sexual orientation, disability, or other socio-cultural factors (Mair, 2009).

Hair typing: Categorizing different hair types using the Andre Walker Hair Typing System™, which divides hair types in categories based on hair texture (Walker, 1998).

Influencer: An individual with an online following who has an expertise in a specific knowledge area that can influence others to take action about a topic (Backaler, 2018).

Institutional discrimination: Occurs when marginalized groups are “systematically disadvantaged by the rules and incentives of organizations and institutions” (Shulman, 1996, p. 49).

Kinky hair texture: Tightly coiled and z-angled curls that are considered the tightest curls that exists (Walker, 1998).

Natural hair: Hair that has not be chemically processed to alter its color or texture (Randle, 2015).

Personal bias: Biases at the personal level can be overt or unconscious. A bias becomes overt when it is expressed explicitly (Cooley, Lei, & Ellerkamp, 2018). An overt bias may be easier to recognize by its victim. An unconscious bias occurs when an unaware or unintentional selection or preference is established or acted upon (Chandler & Munday, 2016).

Product placement: Vloggers sometimes strategically feature products in their videos at the paid request of a brand or company (Gerhards, 2019).

Racism: The prejudice, stereotyping, or discrimination that can occur at individual, interpersonal, or structural levels based on someone’s racial background (McKetta et al., 2017; Salter et al., 2018).

Transitioning: The process of growing out or cutting off chemically treated or damaged hair to allow for one natural hair texture to grow and remain not chemically altered (Randle, 2015).

Vloggers: Individuals who post video blogs online, through YouTube and other online outlets, about their lives or offer product reviews (Lee and Watkins, 2016).

Overview of Research Design

An in-depth semi-structured interview is a less formally structured version of the formal interview, which allows the interviewer to digress from the listed interview questions (Morris, 2015). This study consists of 10 in-depth semi-structured interviews with Black female natural hair vloggers to understand how they describe their experiences with racism and colorism in the natural hair vlogging industry. This type of interview is specifically known for its utility in understanding the experiences of participants (McCracken, 1988).

A thematic analysis with both a feminist framework and critical race framework is used to analyze the data collected from these interviews. All participants have channels on YouTube where they publish content that feature natural hair tutorials, do it yourself (DIY) haircare options, and their personal experiences with natural hair. All YouTube channels have between 5,000 and 200,000 subscribers to represent various levels of success within the natural hair vlogging industry. The sample for the study was obtained by using purposive sampling. Ten participants are included in the study. Interviews were conducted both in-person and through video conferencing. All participants are located in the United States. More details of the methodology are included in Chapter 3.

Significance of Study

Black women specifically seek Black female natural hair vloggers with similar natural hair textures on YouTube for haircare education (Mintel Group, 2017). While this act can be seen as supporting black-owned businesses, I explore if and how these Black female natural hair vloggers experience racism and colorism. Research reveals that discrimination can occur through YouTube's algorithm of visibility (Bishop, 2018). Additional research by Noble (2018)

highlights the ability algorithms have to “reframe our thinking” about race and gender when showing us information in a specific order through search engine results (p. 116). However, it is important to understand whether biases and discrimination are also occurring in compensation, employment opportunities, and channel viewership and engagement.

Currently, there is a gap in the literature on the forms of bias and discrimination Black female natural hair vloggers may experience and the effects that racism and colorism may have on these women. This research study works to fill the gap and examines how Black female natural hair vloggers describe any experiences with personal bias and discrimination from channel viewers and hair care brands on the basis of race, complexion, hair texture, and gender.

Colorism is an important aspect of this dissertation because it is a key component of racism and intraracial discrimination (Keith & Monroe, 2016). Hair texture is closely related to skin complexion, and a variation of hair textures supports different skin colors (Hill, 2002). This variation in hair texture and skin complexion allow the researcher to analyze if colorism, in addition to racism, fueled discrimination in the labor practices of Black female natural hair vloggers as the vloggers understood their situation and its discriminatory dynamics. Colorism is when “disadvantages or advantages” occur based on the light or dark tone of someone’s skin complexion and other externally physical features of individuals of the same race or ethnic group (Keith & Monroe, 2016). These physical features can include skin complexion, hair texture, body shape, and facial features. Previous research has found that gaps in income between light-skinned and dark-skinned Black Americans can be as wide as the gap between Blacks and Whites (Keith & Monroe, 2016).

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. This chapter, Chapter 1, introduces the study by discussing the significance of Black female natural hair vloggers as a focus for critical media study, research questions, and key terms and introduces the research design and overarching thesis of the project.

The chapters proceed as follows: Chapter 2 grounds the dissertation in previous literature and research that have been conducted on Black hair, discrimination against Black women and natural hair textures, YouTube, and the vlogging industry. Chapter 3 explains the methodology of the study. The researcher conducted 10 in-depth semi-structured interviews with Black female natural hair vloggers through video conferencing and in-person. After data had been gathered, a thematic analysis was conducted; the chapter further details this research process. Chapter 4 identifies themes from the descriptions by the vloggers of discriminatory experiences found around race, color, and gender. This chapter answers and discusses RQ1. Chapter 5 explores these themes to find potential associations between their racist and colorist aspects and how Black female natural hair vloggers describe themselves and other Black women with natural hair to answer RQ2. The final chapter, Chapter 6, discusses the themes that were presented in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 and answers RQ3. The discussion provides theoretical and practical recommendations for the field, which include strategies to challenge the racism and colorism Black female natural hair vloggers experience. This dissertation seeks to understand the forms of biases and discrimination Black female natural hair vloggers experience within their industry and how racism and colorism is internalized to manipulate Black women's view of beauty, hair, and race.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This study examines the forms of discrimination and bias that Black female natural hair vloggers describe and how racism and colorism are integrated into these descriptions, including their discourses about other Black women with natural hair. To build a foundation for this analysis, I explore the significance of hair for Black women. I review how race and gender influence discriminatory practices in the workplace on the labor market. After discussing key scholarship about YouTube, I explore its political economic structure and the relationship it has with Black women. I argue that there is limited research on the discrimination that Black women on YouTube and in the vlogging industry experience.

This literature review provides historical context for the evolution of Black hair and the Black hair care industry. I discuss how Black hair is seen as a racial characteristic and cultural signifier and what impact this has had on Black women throughout various stages of history. Literature that highlights the discriminatory practices that Black women have experienced based on hair is discussed. Due to the importance of digital production in this study, I also discuss how the uses of YouTube have progressed over the years to encompass forms of representation, resistance, education, and acts of protest.

I used multiple databases to gather the literature for this review. Databases centered around critical cultural studies, the African American community, and social media. When searching through these databases, I used key terms such as *Black hair*, *YouTube*, *online discrimination*, *Black women discrimination*, *Black women labor*, *vlogging*, and *natural hair*. Sources for this literature review included peer-reviewed journal articles, books, news media journal articles, organizational reports, YouTube videos, and webpages. This literature review

includes approximately 150 sources. To highlight the significance the time periods have had on Black hair and the use of YouTube, the earliest resource dates back to 1969.

Historical Context of Black Hair

To understand fully the significance in the shift to the adoption of natural hair textures and styles for Black women in the early 21st century, it is important to understand the historical meaning and evolution of Black hair and haircare products. Hair holds significant historical context, meaning, and importance in Black communities (Banks, 2000), and hair styles inspired by African culture are seen as art (Sagay, 1983). For centuries across the African continent, hair styles have indicated social status, ethnic tribe, and other background information (Jahangir, 2015; Sagay, 1983).

A critical race theoretical lens examines a societal phenomenon through its relationship with race, racism, and inequities of power (Delgado et al., 2017). It is imperative to apply this lens when examining Black hair. Tensions surrounding Black hair are traced to before slavery in African countries. Curly and kinky hair that was once valued across Africa was used as justification for enslaving Africans in the United States (Morrow, 1973). During and following slavery, as well as currently, Black women are judged by Western beauty standards that traditionally privilege white women over women of color (Banks, 2000). Straight hair texture and long lengths of hair are both seen as ideal in comparison to coarse and kinky hair textures and shorter hair lengths. These characteristics were valued along with a fairer skin complexion (Patton, 2006). Enslaved Black women who did not fit into these Western beauty standards were often forced to work field labor, which was considered more labor intensive.

Despite slavery and segregation as its starting point, Black U.S. male barbers thrived (Byrd & Tharps, 2001). During this time period barbers were reported to have earned up to \$30,000 annually. However, as successful as these Black male barbers were, Black women hair stylists traveled a slower road to success due to a combination of sexism and racism. It was not until the 1820s that Black women began to have success as hair stylists. Both free and enslaved Black women would establish cottage industries, where they maintained and styled Black women's hair and created and sold haircare mixtures like ointments and oils to keep Black hair healthy (Byrd & Tharps, 2001). However, as Black haircare products for women continued to evolve, the goal remained the same. Black women attempted to "assimilate to European culture" by altering the texture of their hair (Hamilton, 2019).

In the 1800s, Black men and women used "bacon grease, butter, and kerosene" to maintain their hair (Hamilton, 2019, para 2). During this timeframe, the hot comb, a French invention, was created to mold hair into different styles (National Museum of African American History & Culture, n.d.). While the hot comb was originally marketed towards White women, Black women used the tool to manipulate their hair texture into straighter strands. In the early 1900s, Black women began to use heavy and thick greases to stretch short curly and kinky hair to appear straight and long (Byrd & Tharps, 2001), mimicking hair of white women. Well-known Black haircare entrepreneurs such as Madame CJ Walker and Anna Turbo Malone created hair products to straighten Black natural hair (Johnson & Bankhead, 2014). However, Blacks were not the only race of people profiting in the black haircare industry. White manufactures entered the Black haircare industry to make a profit, and by mid-1940, held over 50 percent of the market share (Byrd & Tharps, 2001).

The straightening of Black hair textures was still the trend between 1954 and 1979. However, the technique for straightening Black hair textures shifted from using greases and the application of heat to eventually applying chemicals that permanently straightened Black hair (Byrd & Tharps, 2001). As the sales of permanent chemical straightening products soared, small Black-owned haircare product companies were being acquired by larger corporations. By the 1960s, 80% of ethnic haircare products were sold by Johnson Products, a Black-owned business founded by George E. Johnson (Byrd & Tharps, 2001).

The shift to wearing natural hair styles by Black women represents a form of resistance against Western beauty standards. Both younger and older Black women are adopting more natural hair styles with 71% of Black adults wearing a natural hair style “at least once in the past year” (Mintel Group, 2017, p. 5). The journey that Black women face when transitioning to their natural hair texture is seen as a process of “decolonizing the mind and body” (Norwood, 2018, p. 70). Norwood describes her own hair transition journey as one that is emotional and takes much courage to embrace one’s true self in the face of adversity. This shift in the adoption of natural hairstyles for coarse, kinky, and curly hair textures has led to a decrease in the sales of chemical hair relaxers by Black U.S. consumers (Mintel Group, 2017).

Chemical hair relaxers, also referred to as hair straighteners, are chemicals that are used to permanently straighten curly, kinky, coily, or coarse hair textures and primarily used by Black women (Shetty et al., 2013). Between 2011 and 2016, spending on chemical hair relaxers by Black U.S. consumers decreased by 30.8% (Mintel Group, 2017). Despite the decrease in purchases of chemical hair relaxers, sales of shampoo, conditioner, and other hair care products are robust. Although there has been a shift away from products that chemically straighten Black

hair, Black U.S. consumers still spent approximately \$5 billion on Black haircare products between 2015 and 2016.

Black Hair

Black hairstyles are often seen as cultural signifiers for ethnicity, race, class status, politics, marital status, religion, and sexuality (Banks, 2000; Mercer, 1987; Prince, 2009). Black hair, like skin, is often used to classify race (Cooper, 1971; Morrow, 1973). However, the assumptions made when reading Black hairstyles may be incorrect, build on Black stereotypes, and have negative consequences (Patton, 2006; Prince, 2009). Kobena Mercer (1987) argues that when hairstyles are evaluated as an aesthetic practice, all Black hairstyles become inherently political due to dominant and contested meanings that have developed historically. Prince (2009) expands on this thought by discussing the assumptions made when Black women wear their hair in its natural state. At times these women are “assumed to be to be radical, or at least progressive, and maybe lesbian” (p. 16). While there have been misconceptions made around the political meaning of Black hairstyles, there have in fact been moments in history when Black hairstyles did signify politics and a form of resistance.

Although natural hair is becoming more accepted in its various forms, some of those who value natural hair texture still struggle with embracing it because of constructed ideal Western beauty standards (Jeffries & Jeffries, 2014). Media have been used to reinforce the hierarchy of hair beauty standards (Dawson, et al., 2019). Hair with white features has been promoted and celebrated in literature (Okazawa-Rey et al., 1986). Advertisements promote and uplift soft, straight hair (Rooks, 1996). Before hair is straightened, advertisements have referred to Black hair as “kinky, snarly, ugly, and curly” (Rooks, 1996, p. 35). Even Black popular media has pitted Black women against each other based on Western Eurocentric beauty standards

(Robinson, 2011). Bristor et al. (1995) found that Black women with characteristics of “good hair” that was similar to White women’s hair were more likely to be found in televised advertisements than Black women with kinkier hair textures. Even Black hairstyle magazines often portrayed Black women with long, straight or wavy hair (Patton, 2006). While some media have reinforced the negative connotations around Black hair, other forms including African American children’s literature have provided counter messages to these connotations to normalize Black hair (Brooks & McNair, 2014).

Despite inclusionary efforts to embrace all hair textures, such as the hair typing system, Black women are still known to have an intricate relationship with hair because of identity and hair politics. According to Johnson and Bankhead (2014), “identity is inextricably linked to their relationship to and presentation of their hair” for Black women and girls (p. 86). Although at least 71% of younger and older black women wore a natural hair style in 2016 (Intel Group, 2017), Black women are still being ridiculed within certain groups for the texture of their hair when it is worn in its natural state (Johnson & Bankhead, 2014). According to Johnson and Bankhead, 43% of Black women were ridiculed about their natural hair from family members, 28% by strangers, and 25% by their friends. Despite this ridicule, Ellis-Hervey et al. (2016) found that Black women who choose to wear their natural hair are less concerned with what people think about them, leading to a higher self-esteem.

Black hair comes in multiple textures and has been characterized as kinky, course, coily, curly, and wavy (Byrd & Tharps, 2002; Caldwell, 1991; Lester, 2000; Mercer, 2000; Robinson, 2011; Thompson, 2009). These many characterizations of Black hair also have been placed within two larger categories: “good” hair and “bad” hair (Bellinger, 2007; Hamilton, 2019; Lester, 2000; Patton, 2006; Perception Institute, 2017; Robinson, 2011). The debate around

“good” vs. “bad” hair is an effect of colorism (Patton, 2006). Colorism occurs when disadvantages or advantages are based on the light or dark tone of skin complexion and other external physical features of individuals of the same race or ethnic group (Keith & Monroe, 2016). These physical features can include skin complexion, hair texture, body shape, and facial features.

Colorism in the Black community has appeared in various forms over the years. Racism against Blacks evolved from the macro level of Black vs. White. Features of blackness began to be defined as “dark brown skin, kinky hair, and wide noses” and categorized as “barbarism and ugliness” (Hunter, 1998, p. 519). During slavery, enslaved Black women were often forced to straighten their hair to mimic white women (Byrd & Tharps, 2001). Characteristics that were closer to Whiteness such as fairer skin complexion and straight hair were elevated, including by slave masters (Keith & Monroe, 2016; Patton, 2006). Lighter skinned enslaved Blacks were monetarily valued higher than darker complexions (Cole, 2005).

Color consciousness that centers on a hierarchy of race has seeped its way into the thoughts of Black Americans (Okazawa-Rey et al., 1986). It was even perpetuated by the early Black media creators. As early as 1865, the heroines written by Black novelists were described and uplifted by their close proximity to Whiteness, such as their light skin complexion (Okazawa-Rey, et al. 1986). In folklore, the futures of children were speculated based on where they fell on the color spectrum. Color consciousness even transcended into the romantic social interactions that influence Black attraction (Randle, 2015). Skin complexion influences the decisions on marriage, romantic relationships, and childbearing (Okazawa-Rey et al., 1986).

Colorism also has socio-economic effects. In more recent times, research shows that there are gaps in income between light-skinned and dark-skinned Black Americans (Keith & Monroe,

2016). These gaps can be as wide as the gap between Blacks and Whites. Disparities occur before Blacks enter the workforce. Ryabov (2013) found that students with lighter complexions have a greater chance of receiving a college education. The “good” vs. “bad” hair debate is steeped in colorism.

“Good” hair is often described as hair with straighter texture and a wavy pattern (Bellinger, 2007; Dawson et al., 2019; Hunter, 1998; Patton, 2006). The “good” hair texture “minimizes African ancestry, more reflective of a European, Native, or Asian ancestral mix within the Black individual” (Robinson, 2011, p. 359). “Bad” hair is described as kinky, coarse, or tightly coiled and difficult to (Dawson et al., 2019; Patton, 2006; Robinson, 2011). This debate of characterizing Black hair as “good” or “bad” continues to support the ideological hierarchy of races.

Typing Black Hair

In recent years, Black women are opting to wear more hairstyles that feature their natural hair texture in lieu of hairstyles featuring chemical straightened hair (Intel Group, 2017). Some Black hairstyles include dreadlocks, two-strand twists, and braids (Lester, 2000). While these hairstyles are universal across the Black community, Black women have a range of hair textures. Walker (1998) introduced his Andre Walker Hair Typing System™ that divides hair by texture into four different categories with each category ranging between straight hair to the coarsest of textured hair. This system allows women to describe and characterize their hair texture, no matter what that texture may be, to identify haircare products that may be more fitting to care for their particular hair texture. Categorization of curl is important and frequently mentioned in the natural hair community because of the various hair textures represented, therefore, it is worth discussing the four categories here.

The categories in the hair typing system are labeled as Type 1, Type 2, Type 3, and Type 4 (Walker, 1998). Within each hair type, there are two to three subtypes divided by letters A, B, and C. For example, Type 2B hair is a hair type within the hair typing system. In the variations of the hair typing system natural hair vloggers discussed, each hair type category had three subcategories, which only varies slightly from the original version (BiancaReneeToday, 2016; Curls Unbothered, 2015; CurlyPenny, 2014; Sonshyne, 2013). While hair typing is well known in the black community, the hair typing system is supposed to represent women of all races and includes all hair types, including straight hair.

The overall defining term used to characterize Type 1 hair is “straight” hair. Walker describes hair within this category as “fine & fragile to coarse & thin (style resistant)” (What’s My Hair Type, n.d.). There are three subcategories within Type 1: Type 1A, Type 1B, and Type 1C. As hair types move from Type 1A to Type 1C, the hair texture is still straight. However, the hair becomes minimally coarser and thicker. Type 2 hair is defined as “wavy” (What’s My Hair Type, n.d.). Hair within this type is described as “fine & thin to coarse and frizzy.” Type 2 hair also has three different subcategories: Type 2A, Type 2B, and 2C (What’s My Hair Type, n.d.).

The next category is Type 3 hair, which is defined as “curly.” Unlike the first two hair types, Type 3 hair, by Walker’s standards, officially only has two subtypes: Type 3A and Type 3B. Hair within this type is described as “loose curls to corkscrew curls.” Many natural hair vloggers speak of a third hair type, Type 3C (BiancaReneeToday, 2016; Curls Unbothered, 2015; CurlyPenny, 2014; Sonshyne, 2013). This subcategory was not created by Walker but is used to represent the tightest curls without being characterized as “kinky” or “coily.” Type 4 hair is defined as “kinky.” Officially, it also only has two subtypes: Type 4A and Type 4B. Kinky hair is described as “tight coils to Z-angled coils” (What’s My Hair Type, n.d.). Many natural hair

vloggers also speak of an unofficial third hair subcategory for Type 4 hair (BiancaReneeToday, 2016; Curls Unbothered, 2015; CurlyPenny, 2014; Sonshyne, 2013;). This hair type represents the tightest of coils and kinks.

Although hair typing is prominent in the natural hair community, it is clear that Andre Walker also uses the system for monetary gain. On Andre Walker's official website that features hair typing, once a person's hair type has been identified, he encourages website readers to buy specific hair products from his own haircare line to properly care for the reader's specific hair type. There is no mention of other product brands. The website states, "I created the original hair typing system to help you better understand your natural hair texture and take the best care of your hair — using the right Gold System products for optimal results" (What's My Hair Type, n.d.).

Although Andre Walker is the originator of the Andre Walker Hair Typing System™, a brief review of videos on YouTube produced by natural hair female vloggers of color discussing how to type hair reveals that in the two decades since his hair typing system was created, there are now multiple variations of the hair typing system that women of color use (BiancaReneeToday, 2016; Curls Unbothered, 2015; CurlyPenny, 2014; Sonshyne, 2013). However, many of the original attributes from Walker still remain in the generalized and frequently used hair typing system. The hair typing system frequently appears in this study's findings.

Discrimination Against Black Women and Natural Hair Textures

Racial discrimination against Black people exists in the workplace. Across multiple industries there is a wage gap between gender and racial groups (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2003; Lang & Manove, 2011; McGregory, 2013; Schnabel, 2016). In addition to these wage gaps,

some racial groups experience personal-level bias and institutional discrimination. Personal-level biases can occur as early as the resume review process (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2003). In an experimental design study conducted between 2001 and 2002, Bertrand and Mullainathan (2003) sent approximately 5,000 resumes to more than 1,300 job ads. The researchers examined the impact African American-sounding names and White-sounding names had on job applicants receiving callbacks for job openings. Names such as Emily Walsh and Greg Baker represented White-sounding names. Names such as Lakisha Washington and Jamal Jones represented African American-sounding names.

The quality of the resumes also varied to allow Bertrand and Mullainathan (2003) to investigate how credentials also affected the racial gap. Some applicant resumes were drafted to have more experience and skills, consistent employment, and additional certifications. The researchers sent four resumes when applying to each job posting, which represented high-quality and low-quality resumes. They found significant disparity between the percentages of callbacks that individuals with White-sounding names received compared to those with African American names. African Americans needed to submit 15 resumes for every 10 resumes Whites submitted to close the callback gap.

Such discrimination, of course, also has been common in different industries throughout the modern age. In a study on race and gender in the Bell System, Green (2001) argues that the fight for gender equality was not equal for women with an intersecting identity as a person of color, especially Black women. As the Bell System reluctantly began to integrate telephone operator positions, the “white lady” image was diluted. The prestige and rewards that were awarded with being a telephone operator no longer exists. Because of the inclusion of Black women, both races of women in these positions working in continuously decreasing work

conditions. White women felt that this inclusion of Blacks lessened their own “social status” (Green, 2001, p. 206).

To resist the inclusion of Black women in the workplace, which they felt was a direct cause to the lessened work conditions, white women resisted the inclusion of Black operators (Green, 2001). They mobilized together in distributing demeaning images of Blacks within the companies. Antidiscrimination clauses that would assist in achieving equality for Black women were excluded from union contracts. Even when women banded together to form their own unions, these antidiscrimination clauses were still omitted.

Some of the bias and discrimination that Black people experience is hair discrimination. Hair discrimination is “characterized by unfairly regulating and insulting people based on the appearance of their hair” (Mbilishaka et al., 2020, p. 590). Mbilishaka et al. found that hair discrimination can occur based on length, texture, style, color, augmentation, density, and product. Black women, men, and non-binary individuals with natural hair often experience implicit and explicit bias, and subsequent discrimination, based on their natural hair texture (Perception Institute, 2017).

The majority of Black women (85%) feel that discrimination based on natural hair texture is still prevalent (Johnson & Bankhead, 2014). It is still legal in much of the United States to discriminate against someone based on their natural hair texture. In 2020, only four states, California, New York, New Jersey, and Virginia, had passed bills into law based on the CROWN Act— Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair—which ban discrimination based on hair in the workplace (Guzman & Hamedy, 2020; Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair (CROWN) Act, H.R. 5309, 2019).

The Perception Institute (2017) found that White women view Black hair as “less professional” than smoother textures of hair. Even Black women favored these smoother hairstyles in professional settings. This preference is reflected in the pressure Black women feel to straighten their hair for the workplace. The Perception Institute found that 1 in 5 Black women in the workforce feel socially pressured to straighten their hair. Patton (2006) noted that when some Black women straighten their hair for the workplace it is seen as assimilation.

Often Black women experience psychological effects from such hair discrimination (Mbilishaka et al., 2020). Mbilishaka and colleagues (2020) found that after experiencing hair discrimination, participants’ levels of self-esteem decreased and they felt less attractive and more dissatisfied with the appearance of their hair, and feelings of ugliness and shame about their hair. These feelings often lasted for a significant period of time. Hair discrimination also resulted in a desire to obtain longer lengths of hair (Mbilishaka et al., 2020).

A Black Feminist Framework

Unlike White women, Black women experience a different form of oppression due to their racial and gendered identities. As indicated by the Bell System example above, racial equality was not often integrated with struggles for gender equality. During the women’s rights movement, their gender was dismissed because of their race (hooks, 1981). Historically, feminist theory has suppressed Black women (Collins, 1990). Black women’s femininity was denied, even by feminist thought (hooks, 1981). Black feminism is a response to the oppressive nature that feminism was founded upon (Collins, 1990). While some women converted into the third wave of feminism to address the lack of intersectionality, others sorted into Black feminism and other identity perspectives such as queer, race and disabled feminisms as a direct response to a lack of inclusivity in feminist media studies. Black feminism centers the experiences of Black

women (Butler, 2013; Collins, 1990; Hoagland & Penelope, 1988; hooks, 1981; Steeves, 1987). Unlike feminist theory, Black feminism addresses the racial and sexual violence of Black women (Collins, 1990). It was also created as a response to being excluded from the Black Liberation and Black Power movement. Black feminism allowed space for the study of Otherness and the commodification and appropriation of one's racial and ethnic features and culture (hooks, 1992). This appropriation may include the use of certain racially constructed symbols to communicate raw sexuality and "natural" connections to nature that is not assumed for Whiteness; this appropriation can include dominant associations with natural hair styles versus more "civilized" straight hair. The commodification of Otherness does not allow for Black women to stand in the forefront of their creation and production but exploits their features and attributions. This type of exploitation allows White supremacy to maintain the status quo by borrowing fragmenting, decontextualizing and exoticizing elements of Black women and other women of color. Images of Otherness are not fully contextualized and historicized or even always foregrounded, but rather featured in the background to not take away attention from whiteness (hooks, 1992). Even as beauty and its standards evolve, it is still centered on and determined based on Eurocentric physical characteristics. Blackness and Otherness may be featured, but rarely centered. Hunter (2005) describes this new multicultural version of beauty as "white beauty repackaged with dark hair" (p. 57). These standards of beauty, exploitation of Otherness, and proximity to whiteness can have unfortunate consequences in the way Black women view themselves and others (hooks, 1992). The internalized pain Black women experience from being belittled and exploited can lead to aggression and affect their relationship with other Black women.

YouTube

As a safe space for Black women to embrace their natural hair texture and to resist against Western beauty standards of hair, Black women have begun to build communities online and through YouTube to support and uplift natural hair (Sobande, 2017). YouTube has grown tremendously since its inception in 2005. When YouTube was purchased by Google in 2006 for \$1.65 billion, its direction shifted from a site of participatory culture to a company that includes a top-down structure (Burgess & Green, 2009). Times have changed since NBC Universal demanded in 2006 that YouTube remove approximately 500 video clips of NBC content from the site. NBC and its affiliates now have their own channels on YouTube where it hosts its own content. While its function as a site of participatory culture still exists and the site is strongly embedded in large-scale media culture, YouTube's functions and abilities have adapted as a tool of education, advertising, activism, and community building (Burgess & Green, 2009).

YouTube allows anyone to upload videos to its website (Dehghani et al., 2016), which, in turn, allows anyone to become a vlogger. Individuals who post video blogs online, through YouTube and other online outlets, about their lives or offer product reviews are considered vloggers (Lee and Watkins, 2016). YouTube also has opened the opportunity for users to become entrepreneurs through vlogging, but while the nature of this work is precarious given the small potential for significant income, it offers diverse voices in the public sphere. Vloggers have the majority of creative control of the content they produce. Often the content is deeply connected to the vlogger's identity (Jean Christian, 2009). YouTube gives vloggers some agency by serving as a tool for resistance and self-representation (Sobande, 2017). However, like other cultural works, YouTube exists on a capitalistic framework (Banks, 2007). Vloggers use their followers on social media, including YouTube subscribers, as digital social capital (Kim, 2020). This size of a

vlogger's network can have direct impact on awareness and reach for brands, and many vloggers determine their rates by the size of the network because of its effects on tangible outcomes for brands (Kim, 2020).

Many successful, well-known YouTube vloggers now work with multichannel networks (Lobato, 2016). Multichannel networks are firms that work with well-known YouTube personalities to “sell advertising and cross-promote their affiliated channels” (p. 349). Multichannel networks work to increase vloggers' audience base in an effort to increase their advertising income and have altered the value of individual YouTube channels (Lobato, 2016). Because of its influence on advertising through YouTube, the value of channels is now more concerned with its relationships to infrastructure and markets and increasing advertising sales rather than solely communal relationship building. Multichannel networks are not affiliated with YouTube (Lobato 2016). In fact, YouTube discourages its users from establishing relationships with these networks. Although this piece of information may seem like YouTube has its users' best interest at heart, it is important to remember that YouTube is a multinational company and conglomerate, and one owned by one of the largest digital media conglomerates in the world, Alphabet. Like other companies, it is concerned with its bottom line. However, without assistance from multichannel networks and other management companies, vloggers feel uninformed and knowledgeable about the legal aspects of product placement in YouTube videos, which is a key component of the advertising relationship between vloggers and brands (Gerhards, 2019).

YouTube vlogging is an outlet for entrepreneurship for women (Duffy, 2017; Gerhards, 2019; Hou, 2019; Mardon, 2018). Women have various motivators to become entrepreneurs (Ascher, 2012). They may want to increase their overall income, are looking for personal growth,

and are even inspired to make change. Entrepreneurship gives women an opportunity to overcome institutional and cultural barriers such as biases and discrimination (Ascher, 2012). Institutional discrimination occurs against women and ethnic minorities when these groups are systematically disadvantaged by the rules and incentives of organizations and institutions (Shulman, 1996). This type of discrimination can be subtle. Employers often adhere to this form of discrimination in hiring practices because it is normalized from its historical beginnings. Although employers may or may not recognize it as discrimination, they may recognize that this system has always been followed and worked for hiring new employees for their organization.

It is not surprisingly that women's shift in labor to adapt to technological advances is considered gendered. Some scholars argue that modern technology is often enacted as masculinist (Wajcman, 1991). It historically has been used to reproduce masculinity through weapons, industrial machinery, and other society-categorized masculine tools. How does this theory of technology as masculine apply to more recent and advanced technology? Wajcman (1991) argues that feminist perspectives actually shift our understanding of what technology is. This raises questions around how some technological labor is feminized. Duffy (2015) argues that the very nature of social media production is gendered and the aspirational element to this work – the hope that a career/reliable income will result from social-media presence and activity – is gendered. And as a litany of scholarly works have argued, the content of media produced by both analog and digital outlets is also highly gendered.

Wajcman's (1991) feminist critiques of technology can be applied to more recent technological advances to include YouTube. Female vloggers and bloggers encourage and educate women on how to use beauty products and style themselves (Duffy, 2016; Sobande, 2017). While women's role in this process is the entrepreneurial producer, many of these beauty

dictations encourage Western beauty standards (Duffey, 2016). In a study examining the aspirational labor of women within social media, Duffy (2016) found that the aspirational work of these women continues to regurgitate “heteronormative stands of beauty” and capitalist ideologies (p. 454). Because this work is aspirational, corporate brands are commodifying the free labor of these women. Although there is agency in social media production, this labor continues to promote capitalistic and hegemonic ideologies of women. Even women’s decisions to become social media and vlogging entrepreneurs can be gendered. Ascher (2012) argues that female entrepreneurship “can be a way to overcome institutional and cultural barriers as well as a tool to provide the family with additional income” (p. 105). Women have various reasons for becoming entrepreneurs. Some seek achievement and personal growth, while others seek to make change (Ascher, 2012).

Other digital labor outside of vlogging and blogging are also considered to be gendered. The development of social media has also led to a new wave of feminism that hosts its activism online. Dixon (2014) examined feminist identities online through “hashtag feminism” and found that through hashtags, feminists of multiple identities are able to mobilize through virtual communities online. This virtual space gives feminists of color, different sexualities, and different religions a platform to advocate. It also alleviates some of the concern surrounding around feminist labels.

The Many Uses of YouTube

YouTube has become an important part of brands’ marketing strategies (Dehghani et al., 2016). Advertising on YouTube began in 2009 (Jackson, 2011). In a study conducted to examine the influence vloggers have on luxury beauty brands, Lee and Watkins (2016) found that beauty product consumers who are exposed to vlogs have a higher evaluation of luxury beauty brands

than those who are not exposed to these types of vlogs. These results encourage partnerships between beauty brands and beauty vloggers.

A major method brands use for advertising is product placement in vlogs. Gerhards (2019) found that the majority of vloggers on YouTube include some type of product placement within their blogs. These products are often given to vloggers for free or low compensation with the hope that vloggers will place them; those with larger number of followers may receive significant compensation. The more subscribers a lifestyle-based vlogger has, which indicates level of success, increases the probability that they have included product placement (Gerhards, 2019). Success or level of influencer can be determined by views, subscriptions, and comments (Arthurs et al., 2018). Gerhards (2019) also found that the majority of product placements have been paid for by brands. Although product placement is a large element of vlogging, only about half of vloggers included in this study felt well-informed about the legal aspects of including product placements in editorial content and how to properly label videos.

It is important to understand how intersecting identities affect the labor aspect of the beauty vlogging industry. Workers in the creative industries often appear as “individualized subjects” (Banks, 2007, p. 94). Some critical theorists, such as Mark Banks (2007), argue that the individualization of workers in the creative industries can lead to noteworthy benefits, such as a “revival of artistic and creative cultural production” (p. 95). But viewing vloggers as individuals rather than a unified labor force also leads to little ability to collectively bargain for better work conditions and pay.

While YouTube serves as an advertising tool for beauty brands and has the potential for being a resistant space, YouTube videos are also known for reproducing the ideology of traditional media and the dominant culture, including reinforcing and perpetuating racial

stereotypes about people of color (Guo & Harlow, 2014). Guo and Harlow found that of YouTube videos that included racial stereotypes about Blacks, “70% reinforced stereotypes and only 30% challenged them” (p. 290).

Stereotypes about Blacks were coded as “law breaker, uneducated/unintelligent, poor, rapper/entertainer, and athlete/athletic” (p. 289). Latinos were portrayed as “lawbreakers, illegal aliens, unclean, and sexualized (p. 292). Asians were depicted as “sexualized,” nerdy, perpetual foreigners, yellow perils, and model minorities” (p. 289). These stereotypes were depicted through appearance and language. Videos that perpetuate these racial stereotypes received more views than those without. Despite YouTube videos reinforcing and perpetuating racial stereotypes of people of color (Guo and Harlow, 2014), women, trans people, and racial and ethnic minorities still use YouTube as a tool for online activism through acts of protest, resistance, and challenging heteronormative ideologies (Mallapragada, 2016; Sobande, 2017; Miller, 2019).

YouTube also has been used as a digital tool to accompany lobbying efforts around H-4 immigration visas by offering a face to the issue through narration and storytelling (Mallapragada, 2016). An H-1B visa is given to highly skilled foreign workers, often in the IT industry. H-4 visas are allocated to the spouses of H-1B recipients. Because of the gender ratio distribution of H-1B visas, H-4 is primarily seen as a female visa. An H-4 visa holder has significantly less opportunities than recipients of H-1B visas. Video production has given H-4 holders agency in narrating and telling their own stories, which applies visuals and meaning to the immigration reform debate. H-4 holders often lack this agency within the immigration process. Mahajan, an Indian national, recorded a video to add visualization to the immigration reform debate with her status as a H-4 holder (Mallapragada, 2016). Mahajan and other H-4

holders are ineligible to obtain jobs. The holder cannot apply for student loans, which provides a hindrance in obtaining higher education. Without permission from her husband, an H-4 holder is also not allowed to obtain a driver's license. This immigration policy is rooted in patriarchy. It is consistent with the ideology that women should be dependent on men and obtain permission for daily functions outside of the household.

While the majority of user-generated content regarding H-4 visas on YouTube is disseminated through institutional channels, advocacy groups also have also taken advantage of YouTube's ability to have more amateur users have agency over the content they produce. Mallapragada's (2016) critical discourse analysis reveals that user-generated content created by H-4 holders not only highlight unfair immigration policies, but it also advocates for issues addressing patriarchal laws, gendered family structures, and racialized national cultures

YouTube also serves as an educational platform to disseminate information about different disabilities. While there is limited literature on user-generated content on YouTube produced by individuals with disabilities, Brownlow et al. (2013) argue that channels featuring individuals with disabilities, specifically those with autism, offer a type of self-representation that educates neurotypical and/or able-bodied people, while also educating others in disabled communities. YouTube educates viewers about issues around disabilities through content such as vlogs, instructional videos, personal stories, and soliciting donations for causes (Bromley, 2008).

Black Natural Hair Vloggers

The Black hair product industry has gone through a drastic change within the last two decades because of the shift between chemically relaxed hair to a larger acceptance of naturally textured hairstyles (Mintel Group, 2017). This shift has caused black women to seek Black haircare education through word-of-mouth and social media, including vloggers. Black female

natural hair vloggers offer videos that provide black haircare education through haircare product reviews, hair style tutorials, hair maintenance, and other haircare videos.

British Black women, for example, turned to YouTube as a form of activism by creating a virtual community of Black women with natural hair in response to the lack of Black hairdressers in their geographical location (Sobande, 2017). Black women in Britain felt strengthened by the representation provided by black natural hair vloggers. Black female natural hair vloggers also provide a sense of community for black women, which these women reported lacking in everyday primarily white spaces. Women congregate in the comment section of natural hair YouTube channels discussing shared experiences and are able to obtain a sense of belonging.

Female vloggers of all races encourage and educate women on how to use beauty products and style themselves (Duffy, 2016; Sobande, 2017). Despite women's roles as video producers, many of these beauty dictations encourage Western beauty standards (Duffy, 2016), which is why the resistance demonstrated by Black natural hair vloggers is so significant. Duffy found that the aspirational work of these women continues to regurgitate heteronormative stands of beauty and capitalist ideologies, whether they intend to or not. Female digital entrepreneurs are passionate about the content they create (Duffy, 2017), especially Black female natural hair vloggers (Sobande, 2017). However, the work created by female digital content creators is often unpaid (Duffy, 2017). This is similar to the work produced by interns in the female dominated public relations industry (Rodino-Colocino & Berberick, 2015). There is a shared belief among industries that unpaid work is necessary to obtain the experience and knowledge needed to become well-paid and successful. Kuehn & Corrigan (2013) term it as "hope labor" (p.9). Duffy

(2017) refers to it aspirational work. Rodino-Colocino and Berberick (2015) discuss it as “bitch work” (p. 486).

Discriminatory Practices and Bias in the Vlogging Industry

The question has been raised about the possible exploitative nature of aspirational work (Duffy, 2017; Rodino-Colocino & Berberick, 2015). When digital aspirational labor is examined to understand this possible element, it often is explored through a feminist framework to understand the gendered production within the specific industry (Dolber, 2016; Duffy, 2015; Jones, 2016; Pruchniewska, 2017). However, research on aspirational labor in digital production and its discriminatory practices does not include an intersectional framework that consist of gender and race, especially as it exists in relation to Black women.

Kimberly Crenshaw (1989) argues that when understanding the discriminatory practices that Black women experience, viewing these women through a single categorical axis disregards their identities around blackness and womanhood. Focusing on only one identity often leads to the erasure of the other. It also may marginalize a particular group even more than it has already been marginalized. Both racial minorities and women are both “systematically disadvantaged by the rules and incentives of organizations and institutions” when employed by certain establishments (Shulman, 1996, p. 49). When attempting to understand the discrimination that Black female natural hair vloggers may experience, we must examine how both their racial identity and gender may impact their experience.

Institutional discrimination can be discreet, which makes it more difficult to measure (Shulman, 1996). It is normalized because it has been historically used and seen as a successful method in selecting new hires within a workplace. The vlogging industry needs to be examined to better understand how institutionalized racism and sexism may be affecting workers in this

industry who have strong intersecting identities of race and gender, especially in an industry that thrives off the personalization of products such as vlogs. A vlog is a personal product. While video blogs can cover various topic areas such as brand evaluations, product promotions, and advocacy through information dissemination (Evans, 2016; Liu et al., 2019; Schwemmer & Ziewicki, 2018), it can all be characterized as an expression of self (Jean Christian, 2009).

YouTube content creators have been lauded for the authenticity and personalization of their videos, particularly with vlogs; however, there has been some criticism that YouTubers and vloggers are making certain adaptations to appeal to both viewers and YouTube's algorithm, which brings unauthentic characteristics into vlogs (Burgess & Green, 2009). In 2006, the well-known popular vlog by YouTube user Lonelygirl15, also known as Bree, raised some red flag around authenticity for viewers. Bree had multiple vlogs posted on YouTube and received about 50,000 views a week. The popular video that raised questions around authenticity involved Bree sharing concerns that she was having with her parents and another vlogger she was dating. Her parents were religious and did not want her dating the vlogger. It was revealed that Bree's vlog was a film experiment, but the publicity around this vlog legitimized vlogging as a "subgenre of cultural production" (Burgess & Green, 2009, p. 28).

Sophie Bishop (2018) casts YouTube's algorithm and the behavior it encourages in a discriminatory light. She argues that YouTube's algorithm creates a "discriminatory visibility hierarchy of bloggers" (p. 69). Through this hierarchy, vloggers with certain socioeconomic factors are positioned above those with other socioeconomic factors. While vloggers may not explicitly be aware of socioeconomic and other demographic information that are factored into the algorithm, there is an understanding that to obtain more visibility on YouTube, unspoken rules should be followed. Consequently, vloggers alter content styles, tone of voice, word choice,

and self-presentation in an effort to conform to appeal to this hierarchy, which they believe will lead them to success. Bishop argues that feminized content is often rewarded by YouTube. This type of behavior, which is fueled by capitalism, removes the vlogger's agency from the production processes. Instead of creative control over content, the vlogger begins to develop content and adopt an editing format believed to appeal to its viewers and which will gain increased visibility.

The need to appease YouTube's algorithm can also influence the content topic produced by YouTube users, including content that features racial ideologies (Guo & Harlow, 2014) because of the desire and need to produce popular videos. There are numerous ways to measure the popularity of YouTube videos (Burgess & Green, 2009). Measurements include most viewed, most responded, most discussed, top rated, most favorited, previously popular, and most active. While vloggers may not explicitly be aware of the specific factors within the algorithm, it still may encourage the type of content presented, the manner in which the content is presented, the vlogger's tone of voice, and even word structure in order to produce a popular video (Bishop, 2018). Another concern about digital algorithms is its ability to create meaning for racial and gender minority groups (Noble, 2018). Noble assessed how algorithms dictate what is shown in what order when searching for information about young Black girls on the internet. In the results she found that the algorithm presented her with sexualized content about Black women.

The literature review shows that Black women have historically experienced racism and colorism, which has also been the basis of much of the discrimination they've experienced. These experiences have occurred in the workplace, on the internet, in the health care system, and in educational institutions. This dissertation study employs a qualitative interview method to

examine the discursive articulations of Black female natural hair vloggers. The key points from this literature review were used to develop the interview protocol in this study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This study uses in-depth semi-structured interviews to answer three research questions: How do Black female natural hair vloggers describe the forms of bias and discrimination that they Black female natural hair vloggers experience? How are themes of racism and colorism embedded in the ways Black female natural hair vloggers describe themselves and other Black women with natural hair? and, What strategies can be used to challenge the racism and colorism that Black female natural hair vloggers describe?

An in-depth semi-structured interview, also known as a long interview, is one of the most “powerful methods in qualitative armory” (McCracken, 1988, p. 9). This qualitative method allows the investigator to move toward a thorough understanding of the experiences of study participants or, at least, how the interviewees describe their experiences. Qualitative studies differ from quantitative methods in that qualitative studies define categories and themes during the investigative process (McCracken, 1988). Quantitative methods offer the “what” to topics of inquiry, while qualitative methods, specifically interviews, can address the why and how. It allows the researcher to discover new data through discourse. There is no question that hair discrimination exists (Asmelash, 2020; J. F. Davis, 2018; Guzman & Hamedy, 2020; Jouelzy, 2014; Lester, 2000; Mbilishaka et al., 2020; Neil & Mbilishaka, 2019; Robinson, 2011; Susan, 2014). However, this dissertation uses a qualitative method to understand the how Black female nature hair vloggers understand different types of discrimination and bias and ways that that racism and colorism are integrated into Black women descriptions of their hair and of other women who have natural hair.

According to Lindlof and Taylor (2013), long interviews have multiple purposes. They are conducted to determine participants’ experiences and perceptions, to understand the

participants' pasts, and to verify information obtained by other methods. During qualitative interviews, the interviewers ask participants a series of questions. The structure of these interviews varies. In-depth semi-structured interviews occur when the interviewer allows room for digression from a set list of interview questions (Morris, 2015). This digression gives the interviewer space to clarify participants' answers and follow-ups on a key topic. The qualitative interview method was imperative to being able to answer the research questions of this dissertation study. As the next chapter illustrates, when discussing delegate topics like racism and experiences with racism, follow up questions and probing particular statements can often prompt interviewees to offer more detail, which in turn lead to clarification, or even reassessment of, initial responses/statements.

3.1 Participants

Ten participants were included in the study. All participants were self-identified women of African descent without a chemical straightening product applied to their hair. Participants lived in Georgia, Illinois, Maryland, North Carolina, Texas, Virginia, and Washington, DC. All participants were above the age of 18-years-old and are Millennials and Generation Z. Millennials were born between 1981 and 1996 (Dimock, 2019). Generation Z were born in 1996 and on. The study, then, includes vloggers who are both more solidly "digital natives" and those born before the widespread adoption of digital media; key racialized/racist cultural moments of each group may vary (The Central Park Five; Rodney King; Hurricane Katrina). Although both generations use social media differently, they both significant engage across different social platforms (Kaplan, 2020).

To understand the first-hand accounts of the different forms of discrimination and bias Black female natural hair vloggers of varying levels of influence experience, I interviewed Black

female natural hair vloggers with various numbers of YouTube channel subscribers to examine their discourse. All participants had their own YouTube channel where they publish content about natural hair. Content includes do-it-yourself (DIY) hairstyles and haircare, hair tutorials, and hair product reviews. Each YouTube channel has more than 5,000 subscribers. By lowering the minimum criterion to 5,000 subscribers, this allows for the study's participants to represent different levels of influence, which include micro influencers and macro influencers. This wide representation allowed me to examine the first-hand accounts from Black female natural hair vloggers who are at various levels of success. At the time the interviews were conducted, the range of YouTube subscribers of all participants was between 5,000 and 200,000 subscribers. Some participants vlogged full-time while others vlogged part-time. While refreshments were provided during in-person interviews, the participants were not compensated. To recruit participants for this dissertation study, I used purposive sampling to specifically seek out study participants who fit in this subscriber range and obtain participants who had different skin complexions and hair textures, which would increase the amount of useful data being collected.

Before any study participants were recruited, I sought approval from the Pennsylvania State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) to work with human participants and mitigate any risk that they may face. After the IRB review process, I received exempt status. The status deemed that there was no amount or minimal risk to study participants.

3.2 Sampling and Recruitment

To understand the perceived forms of discrimination that Black female natural hair vloggers experience and the discursive articulation that racism and colorism have on the way these vloggers describe themselves and hair texture, I recruited Black female natural hair vloggers on YouTube with more than 5,000 subscribers to participate in in-depth semi-structured

interviews. All participants had their own YouTube channel where they publish content about natural hair. These women were selected because of their race, the content of their digital YouTube channel, and the number of YouTube subscribers they had. The minimum number of YouTube subscribers for each participant was set at 5,000 because it is an early indicator of video popularity and vloggers' level of influence (Figueiredo et al., 2014); it also allows for the study's participants to represent different levels of influence, which include micro influencers and macro influencers. While the minimum number of subscribers is an indicator of popularity, it is not too high that it excludes vloggers who may be on the up and coming in the natural hair vlogging community. Content includes do-it-yourself (DIY) hairstyles and haircare, hair tutorials, and hair product reviews.

Because I wanted to explore the experiences of Black female natural hair vloggers who lived in specific geographical locations, I used purposive sampling to recruit participants for this study. Purposive sampling is used to seek out certain populations that may be the most useful to the study (Kelly, 2010). When using this sampling technique, I divided the population into different geographical groups and specifically sought out Black women of different skin complexions and hair textures. However, out of the participants who responded, there was not an equal number of participants with the same hair texture or skin complexion. This may have had an impact on the findings of the data collected.

Geographical locations were selected based on the locations that I had resources to travel to interview the participants onsite. The geographical groups were North Carolina, the Washington, DC metropolitan area (including Northern Virginia and Southern Maryland), and Georgia. An additional group was created that consisted of Georgia, Illinois, and Texas where participants were interviewed through video conferencing. This allowed for me to increase the

number of potential participants to include participants that I would not have been able to interview due to physical location constraints.

To maximize my chances of recruiting study participants, I also used the snowball sampling method. Snowball sampling occurs when the researcher recruits someone to serve as both a study participant and as a recruiter for other participants through referrals (Lindolf & Taylor, 2011). One potential participant recommended other vloggers for me to contact after she declined the initial request for her own participation. Also, a vlogger who was not invited to participate in the study, suggested other vloggers for me to contact. Natural hair vloggers can be considered a difficult to reach group because people often contact them frequently for various reasons. Sometimes they are contacted for business opportunities, and other times subscribers reach out to them for guidance on how to care for their hair texture. The snowball sampling offered validity to my request for an interview with the vlogger. This attempt was made to increase the chance of responses from vloggers. The interviews were conducted with a timespan of two weeks. The goal of snowball sampling was to increase the chance of conducting more interviews with samples within a small period of time. However, none of the potential participants contacted from the snowball sampling method participated in the study.

Once potential participants with more than 5,000 YouTube subscribers were identified, I obtained their email addresses from their YouTube channel. An email was sent directly to each potential participant with a request to participate in the study. Participants gave implied consent in their responses to the email invitation. Also, participants gave verbal consent at the beginning of the interview.

3.3 Interview Protocol and Procedure

I conducted all interviews. A total of ten in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted either in-person or through video conferencing. To ensure privacy and confidentiality, all in-person interviews were held in reserved private rooms in public libraries or conference rooms at hotels. Each interview last approximately between 30 minutes and one hour. The video interviews were held using Skype and Google Duo. I began interviewing participants in March 2020, the month that states began shutting down due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to COVID-19 and shutdowns occurring across the country, some scheduled in-person interviews had to transitioned to video conferencing. In total, three interviews were conducted in-person, and seven interviews were conducted through video conferencing.

Each interview lasted between 30 minutes and one hour and was recorded using a portable audio recorder. Because I had a limited amount of time to conduct this study, the audio recordings of interviews were transcribed using an automated transcription service, Scribie. I paid to have all audio files transcribed with my own personal funds; no external funds were used. Once each recording was transcribed through the automation system, I relistened to the interviews to edit the transcription of any errors that may have been made throughout the automated transcription process.

At the beginning of each interview, I attempted to build rapport with the participant before the interview began to help to establish a connection between myself and the interviewee. This connection allowed participants to be comfortable discussing topics that may have been perceived as difficult. Due to the possible tense nature of the key topics of the study, which were discrimination, racism, and colorism, I wanted the interviewees to be as comfortable as possible during the interview process, thereby enabling them to be more forthcoming.

3.3.1 Self as instrument

During the interviews, the interviewer acted an instrument within the study. Qualitative research requires researchers to “sort and ‘winnow’ the data, searching out patterns of association and assumption” (McCracken, 1988, p. 19). The decisions of what and how to sort through data to identify themes are determined by the experiences and knowledge of the investigator. While self as instrument is not appropriate for every in-depth interview, this instrument is used when the researcher is able to “search out a match in one's experience for ideas and actions that the respondent has described in the interview” (McCracken, 1988, p. 19). McCracken describes an experience where he used himself as the instrument to conduct the interview in a study. During the interview, the respondent spoke of the relationship with his grandfather. McCracken was able to reflect on his own family relationships to put into perspective the dynamics of which the respondent was discussing.

All participants for this study were Black women with natural hair. The interviewer had a shared identity of race and hair similarity to the participants. This shared identity offered insight into the experiences of Black women with natural hair. For example, there are various subgroups and terms used to describe multiple textures of Black hair. Some women use the hair typing system to characterize their natural hair texture while others use terms such as course, curly, or kinky. The awareness of these terms, along with the experiences and characteristics that are often associated with these hair types and textures, were placed into perspective during the interview, which allowed for me to form productive and necessary follow-up questions.

McCracken (1988) argues that the relationship between the researcher and the participant is one of the most complex aspects of qualitative research. He emphasized that before a relationship is even established between the two, the study participant begins to develop an idea

about the interviewer's identity based on their physical appearance, study description, and the institution that the researcher represents. These identity cues given by the interviewer can alter how the participant responds in the interview and interacts with the research stimuli. While it is impossible for the interviewer to completely remove all identity cues that may trigger participants, it is sometimes necessary for the interviewer to take measures to avoid potential provocations.

There are many debates and reported tension in the natural hair community between women with different hair textures (Howard, 2015; Susan, 2014; Lawton, 2016). Women describe "natural hair" using multiple characteristics. Some define natural hair as hair without straightening chemicals. Others describe natural hair as those with no applied chemicals at all (Susan, 2014). Women with more coily and kinky hair textures reportedly experience discrimination based on their hair texture and don't see equal representation of more course, kinky, and coily hair textures, also known as 4C hair, on social media, at natural hair events, and in advertisements (Jouelzy, 2014). As the interviewer, then, my hair is a significant attribute, especially for this topic and these interviewees.

I shared similar identities of race and natural hair with the study's participants. To prevent the participants from potentially establishing a preconceived relationship with me that would influence their answers based on what they thought I wanted to hear, I had my hair braided into knotless braids to avoid participants identifying my specific natural hair texture or type. Knotless braids are single braids without a knot at the root of the scalp. They are worn for stylistic purposes and are considered a protective hairstyle.

By wearing knotless braids to conceal my natural hair texture, I attempted to avoid intimacy developed based on a similar hair texture and mistrust based on the difference in hair

texture between myself and participants. Knotless braids can be worn with almost all hair textures. Therefore, it was difficult for participants to identify my hair texture while wearing this hair style. Although I wore knotless braids to hide my specific hair texture and type, I still wanted to visually communicate that I share the same identities of race and a woman with natural hair with the participants. These shared broad identities were important for this study because if the participant believed that I belonged to the same broad identity group as the participant, they may have been more willing to candidly share about their experiences without trying to alter their responses to please me.

3.4 Thematic Analysis: Discrimination, Racism, and Colorism

Thematic analysis is a type of analysis that organizes qualitative data into themes around discovered similarities and consistencies (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The purpose of a thematic analysis is to identify themes and patterns within data obtained from qualitative methods such as in-depth semi-structured interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Clarke & Braun, 2013). For this study, to examine the perceptions and experiences of Black female natural hair vloggers, I conducted a thematic analysis to identify themes and patterns around discrimination, racism, colorism, identity, and self-description in the natural hair vlogging industry. I conducted the thematic analysis on the entire qualitative dataset, which allowed me to recognize “shared meanings and experiences” of the study participants. Each participant was given a pseudonym that will be used to discuss the study’s findings and reflections.

Since its conception in the mid-1970s by Gerard Houlton, thematic analysis has been used in various fields, including communications, psychology, health care, government relations, and business (Barker et al., 2019; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Jones et al., 2011; Merton, 1975; Roy, 2019; Smith et al., 2012). Thematic analysis is known for its flexible approach to interpreting

data (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Researchers can use an inductive or deductive approach to data coding and identifying themes. However, it is rare for a researcher to solely rely on only one of these two approaches (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

Thematic analysis' recognition and usage have evolved over the years. In 2006, Braun and Clarke created a six-phase approach when conducting a thematic analysis. The first stage consists of researchers completely immersing themselves into the data. This occurs by rereading transcriptions or questionnaire responses. After this immersion, the researcher begins coding the data, which is followed by identifying themes. The fourth stage focuses on reviewing the identified themes to determine any alterations that need to be made. The researcher then defines the themes. Braun & Clarke (2006) define a theme as information that "captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning with the data set" (p. 82). The criteria for strong themes include keeping themes simple, ensuring they do not overlap with other themes, and having themes speak directly to the study's research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The final stage occurs when the researcher transfers the analysis into a report or publication.

For the thematic analysis for this study, I generated themes using a latent coding method that invoked both a feminist theoretical framework and a critical race theoretical framework. Black women's intersecting identities of race and gender are both significant to their identities, experiences, and to this study. Using both frameworks allowed me to how the participants' intersecting identities influenced patterns in the dataset. In my analysis, I also used a heavily deductive approach where I specifically analyzed the data for concepts of racism, colorism, discrimination, gender, and labor. In Chapter 4, I examine the themes that around the participants' descriptions of discrimination and bias in the natural hair vlogging industry.

Chapter 4: Vloggers Descriptions of Discrimination and Bias in the Natural Hair Vlogging Industry

This dissertation examines the experiences of Black female natural hair vloggers in an effort to explore understandings of the discriminatory practices and bias Black women experience in the natural hair vlogging industry. To identify discrimination and bias in the natural hair vlogging industry, I conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with 10 Black female natural hair vloggers who represent different levels of success in this industry. After the qualitative data had been collected, I used a thematic analysis to answer the following research question:

RQ1: How do Black female natural hair vloggers describe the forms of bias and discrimination that they Black female natural hair vloggers experience?

The thematic analysis revealed three forms of discrimination and bias that Black women in the natural hair vlogging industry describe as experiencing: pay discrimination, discrimination that hinders the development of business partnerships with hair care brands, and bias in social media representation. The analysis also discovered themes in the ways Black women respond to bias and discrimination. Although previous research on natural hair vloggers shows that natural hair vlogs uplift and empower Black women by offering Black women an online communal space to resist Western beauty standards (Sobande, 2017), I find that Black female natural hair vloggers still express that they experience racist, colorist, and sexist practices throughout multiple aspects of the vlogging industry because systems of racism and colorism endure even in virtual spaces that are deemed safe and uplifting for Black women. Themes also emerged about

preferences of hair texture and skin color in the industry. Also, women with darker skin and coarser hair texture tend to receive the most bias and discrimination. One finding around vloggers' descriptions of discrimination was most interesting. Although vloggers shared and described experiences of discrimination, initially, three vloggers directly rejected these experiences.

4.1 Vloggers Experience and Initial Denials of Discrimination and Bias

When examining the data to reveal what forms of discrimination and bias that Black female natural hair vloggers experience, I found that although Black female natural hair vloggers do eventually note that they experience multiple forms of discrimination and bias, initially three of the vloggers directly rejected the notion that they were victims of discrimination and bias or that they have been discriminated against for any reason.

Jada seemed to immediately distance herself from any first-hand experiences of discrimination in the natural hair vlogging industry. She felt that she had not been discriminated against from either hair care brands or her online audience. When asked whether she had been discriminated in the industry, she said:

I can't say that I have personally, not by brands and not by my audience either.

Moreover, Jada believes her audience is very supportive of her and her content.

Kathryn reacted similarly when directly asked whether she had personally experienced discrimination in the vlogging industry. Kathryn rejected the idea that she had been discriminated against during her vlogging career and explained why. She said:

No, I haven't. And I think it's because the way I carry myself. I don't know if it's... 'Cause I'm a bad... I look good, I'm a bad B, okay? And I make my hair look good with me. So there's nothing you can come to me and say that is gonna hurt me, 'cause you know I look good because my hair is 4C and I still look good, and I carry that 4C hair with confidence. So, there's nothing anybody can say to me.

In addition to Kathryn claiming that she had not been discriminated against, she stated that the way she carried herself prevented her from experiencing discriminatory practices and bias.

Deja's interview followed a similar pattern as Jada and Kathryn's interviews. Initially, Deja could not think of any instances where she had been discriminated against. When asked if she had ever experience discrimination or bias in the natural hair industry, she said:

None that I can think of.

However, in follow-up questions and later elaborations, all three described encounters with racism in their capacity as vloggers. For example, when discussing how viewers and commenters interact with her, Jada pointed out that she does still receive negative comments from online viewers that are based on her race and sex. Some of these comments are so hostile that she deletes them. When asked to elaborate on some of the comments, in blunt terms she said:

Oh gosh, everything like nigger, like you bitch, you're ugly. I don't... Yeah, like crazy stuff like "I don't know why you're out here," like "Your hair is breaking off," like "I can't believe, why did you decide to wear this?" "Why do you look like this?" "I can't believe..." You'll get like people cussing you out, literally trying to tear you down for no reason. It's like, "Really?"

Similarly, later in the interview Kathryn described experiences of hair care brands preferencing Black natural hair vloggers with lighter skin complexion and finer hair textures over her darker complexion and coarser hair. This experience of colorism in the natural hair industry mimics the overall gaps in income between light-skinned and dark-skinned Black Americans that was found by Keith & Monroe (2016).

As the interview continued, Deja also began to reflect on experiences of unfair treatment with hair care brands. She detailed moments where she was discriminated against and denied opportunities to work with hair care brands. She acknowledged that other vloggers who had less success and fewer subscribers received more opportunities than she did. This is another disadvantage of colorism (Keith & Monroe, 2016). Deja strongly suspected that she was being discriminated against based on her coarse hair texture, which she describes as kinky and 4A when using the hair typing system. She shared:

I feel like I don't make as much as I would if I had a different type of hair texture.

Despite these initial rejections that Black female natural hair vloggers had been discriminated against or experienced bias in the natural hair vlogging industry, their responses as the interviews progressed revealed that Black women were aware of and could describe discrimination against and face bias throughout various aspects of the industry. However, while the descriptions of their experiences are categorized as discrimination, the participants chose not to use that terminology. Other examples are detailed, often from these interviewees, later in this chapter.

4.2 Forms of Discrimination and Bias

Interviews uncovered the vloggers descriptions of multiple categories of discrimination and bias. As highlighted above from the experiences of Kathryn, pay discrimination is one form of discrimination and bias that Black female natural hair vloggers experience. Multiple vloggers shared instances where they felt they were paid less than other vloggers and believed this disparity was based on their hair texture. Additionally, Black female hair vloggers identify another form of discrimination and bias in the opportunities available to develop business partnerships with hair care. The final form of discrimination and bias that vloggers experience is through social media representation from hair care companies. These forms of discrimination and bias highlight the prevalence of colorism and racism in the natural hair vlogging industry.

4.2.1 Pay discrimination

The thematic analysis revealed that one form of bias and discrimination that Black female natural hair vloggers experience occurs around monetary compensation from hair care brands, which is known as pay discrimination. Hair care brands focus on the selling of hair care products and hair tools. Black women shared multiple experiences where they believed they were not compensated fairly and equally in comparison to other natural hair vloggers. During one experience, Deja determined that she was not earning the same monetary compensation for similar work she was producing in comparison to other natural hair vloggers. She said:

I guess I'm comparing myself to other people, like, for videos I will put out. It'll just be like \$100 vs. someone that now might get like a \$1000 or more for the same. And also, like, if you're being offered \$100 or \$150, I say you're doing a video from start to finish,

8-10 hours, it feels like you're not being compensated fairly, especially for the amount of money that the company is going to make.

When Black female natural hair vloggers shared their experiences of not being compensated fairly in the vlogging industry, they made it clear that they believed this pay inequity was based on a bias against their hair texture because it was considered the most coarse and kinky on the hair typing chart. This assumption is supported by the income gap that exists between light-skinned and dark-skinned Black Americans (Keith & Monroe, 2016). This rationale appeared across all forms of discrimination: compensation from hair care brands, business partnerships, and social media representation. The experiences of bias and discrimination that were shared came from Black women with hair texture that is overwhelming categorized as kinky and/or coily. When using the hair typing system, this type of hair would be considered Type 4.

When describing her hair texture, Deja said:

I would describe it as kinky, s-shaped. Very kinky, but also loose at the same time. It's weird. I would say I'm 4A if I were to categorize it.

Deja believed her hair texture was the reason hair care brands did not equally compensate her financially in comparison to other natural hair vloggers they were working with to produce vlogs. She said:

I feel like I don't make as much as I would if I had a different type of hair texture.

While Deja did not directly indicate which type of hair textures she believed gets compensated more than her own texture, it can be understood that she is referring to Type 3 hair, which has a looser curl pattern than Type 4 hair textures. This type of hair is considered finer than Type 4

hair or textures that are known to be coarse and kinky. The sentiment that Deja discussed of hair texture preference also appears in the other two forms of bias and discrimination revealed in the analysis that will be discussed in the business partnerships and social media representation section later in this chapter.

Lack of knowledge of pay equity. Other Black women who also felt that they were not being compensated fairly by hair care brands expressed that it was due to their own “ignorance” or lack of knowledge about the natural hair vlogging industry that allowed them to be taken advantage of and not be compensated fairly. This lack of knowledge correlates with Gerhards’ (2019) finding of vloggers being unfamiliar with certain legal aspects of the advertising relationship between vloggers and brands. Deja, who shared concerns of not being compensated fairly after comparing her pay with another vlogger, felt that she accepted unfair payment because she was unaware of certain business aspects of the industry. She stated:

I think a lot of it was just playing off of my ignorance. I think a lot of people do have more knowledge about what they should ask for. Yeah, um, I had people reach out and offer free products for a full review and also tell me exactly what to say, how to plan out the video, and things like that and the only compensation will be the video. I’ve never done videos like that, but I’ve had a lot of companies reach out to me, just offer their free products in exchange for a video review.

Other Black natural hair vloggers articulated similar feelings about their lack of knowledge in the natural hair vlogging industry that they believed led to unfair compensation. Kiara shared her lack of understanding about compensation within the industry and felt that due to this inexperience, she was not able to efficiently advocate for herself against pay discrimination. When asked if she felt that she was being compensated fairly, she responded:

I would say no. Because one thing is, like, you never know really how much you should charge someone. Because what are you basing that off of? Like, who is giving you the amount to say you should charge this much? No one has that amount. So you're really, ideally you're coming up with a price on your own, to try to charge someone.

Ashley shared a similar experience of having a lack of knowledge of the industry but appeared to take it a step further by placing the responsibility of pay disparity upon herself instead of hair care brands. Originally, Ashley thought she was being compensated fairly by hair care brands. However, once she learned more about the industry, compensation, and rates, she realized that she was not being compensated equally to industry pay standards. Ashley said:

I would say that I thought I was [being compensated fairly] based off of the knowledge that I had. Once I gained more knowledge, an awareness of what was actually happening in the space, I realized that I had been undercharging myself.

By using the term “undercharging,” Ashley seemed to put the responsibility for the lack of pay equity on herself rather than the companies who pay her. Ashley absolves the hair care brands of responsibility. Although she recognized pay disparity, she did not consider the disparity to be “unfair.” Ashley said:

So I wouldn't say that it was unfair, it's just I didn't really know. Again, because this type of information wasn't shared widely, so there was no standard for anything, it was just whatever you could negotiate for yourself.

Jessica also appears to blame herself for the pay discrimination. Although Jessica did express that the monetary compensation she was receiving for her labor was unfair, she explained that

she was unsure of what to charge and came up with her own prices without understanding the rates vloggers charge for work produced. Jessica said:

But when I first started a brand reached out to me and I'm just like, "Well, I don't know how much I'm supposed to charge, so I'll just charge 300." For all I know that could have been lower than what I'm supposed to charge.

Social media influencers are entrepreneurs (Duffy, 2017). Vlogging is a part of this entrepreneurial work. As entrepreneurs, Black female natural hair vloggers set their own rates and hours. For Black women who are inexperienced and unfamiliar with the vlogging industry, it is easier for these women to be taken advantaged of and discriminated against as is reflected in the experiences they shared as Black female natural hair vloggers. Black women seem to view these types of encounters as just being a part of the vlogger experience in the natural hair vlogging industry. They view it as a part of the business. Tierra said:

You can tell what you're working with by the way how they approach you. Sometimes if it seems very professional and almost as if they very specifically found you and wanted you, as opposed to a pre-written message that they just put your name and you can tell their PR person is just trying to find whoever they can find... and just see who's gonna work with us, and then we'll go from there. You can tell when a brand is genuinely interested in you. For example, I worked with a brand called SwirlyCurly, and it was like she... The brand owner reached out to me. We spoke via Skype. We actually had an interaction. She told me what she expected from me and she told me why she liked my content, as opposed to a brand just reaching out to you so they can just have as many people on their bandwagon as much as possible. So you can tell when it's really genuine

and when it's like, "Okay, you're just trying to... You need quotas," or, "You need numbers," which I get it both ways, it's a business.

Hope labor and accepting hair products as compensation. While there is a theme among Black female natural hair vloggers of having a lack of knowledge of the appropriate amount of monetary compensation to receive, Black women, however, still recognize when hair care brands attempt to pay them unfairly by offering hair products, tools, and/or accessories as an alternative to monetary compensation for their labor. Hair products do have monetary value, but Black natural hair vloggers expressed concerns about this method of compensation and if it should even be considered compensation: Asia said:

And the issue we're all dealing with right now, with vloggers and influencers period, is people give us free stuff and they call that the payment. And in my little group of friends, we're like, "That shampoo doesn't pay my bills, basically." But, yeah, so the brand deal sponsorships, things like that.

Although hair products do range in monetary value, some Black female natural hair vloggers do not consider it to be compensation at all when hair care brands offer hair products in exchange for labor. Instead, they view it as public relations efforts on behalf of the hair care brand. Deja said:

I would consider [receiving free product] more of PR. Them just sending it out, and if I like it and to just happen to mention it in a video then so be it. But it definitely wasn't compensation. I didn't feel like it was compensation.

Another Black female natural hair vlogger argued that while some in the natural hair vlogging industry may accept free hair products or tools in exchange for labor, it is still unfair because the

vlogger is producing labor on behalf of the hair care brand. This form of compensation or lack of compensation can be seen as aspirational work, hope labor, or bitch work (Duffy, 2017; Kuehn & Corrigan, 2013; Rodino-Colocino & Berberick, 2015). In explaining their journeys to success as Black female natural hair vloggers, Black women often accept free hair product or tools as compensation in exchange for labor in the beginning of their vlogging career. However, they often eventually transition to no longer accepting free hair products and tools as compensation once they reach a certain level of success. Jessica accepted free hair products in tools in the beginning of her vlogging journey. She stated:

Well, when I first started, I was taking the free products. Free products, which is fine for some people. But once you're starting to actually spend time and your energy and you're perfecting your craft, you wanna at least be compensated in money, money form.

This was a common theme among participants. They believed that accepting low compensation, ignoring pay discrimination, receiving free hair products or tools, and producing free labor early on helped them to build their platform in the long run. Asia even referred to this method as a way to build her resume as a Black natural hair vlogger. She said:

Yeah, I have accepted free products before, especially in the beginning. Just to build up my resume, as well. Just get experience working with a company and just talk about something.

It is not until Black female natural hair vloggers reach a certain level of success that they recognize receiving free hair products and tools or producing labor for exposure is not adequate compensation for their work. Jessica said:

So, when I first started, I started doing stuff for free 'cause I'm still trying to build my platform and stuff like that. And then now, since I'm bigger than what I was last year, I actually want to be compensated in cash 'cause I'm actually using my time, my camera, my lighting, my editing. So, you wanna be compensated in some kinda way.

In addition to building their own vlogging platform with little compensation, Black women also served as administrators and moderators for natural hair Facebook groups, adding to their mostly uncompensated labor. According to Asia:

I joined this Facebook group. And they were like, "We need videos once a week, guys." And I was like, "Oh, here's my moment." Like now I really have to make a video to be part of this... The master group on Facebook. So yeah, I finally just set up my phone and sat in front of the sunlight in my room and just started talking. That was in 2015.

So, the woman who started it wanted active people, people who were admins in the group and who actually would be in there and would go live once a week and talk about different things. She actually wanted a lot, now that I think about it.

In this role as administrator, Asia dedicated hours a week to assisting in managing the natural hair Facebook group by hosting live videos sessions about natural hair and engaging with group members. Administrators were required to engage with the group at list once a week. She explained:

So, once a week, everybody would have a day they would go live. And we would just think of random topics to talk about natural hair, so... That really got me out the comfort zone. That was my real-life, first push to start vlogging consistently. It wasn't [a paid opportunity] which is why I'm saying she asked a lot. For nothing in return. But I do a lot

of opportunities like that. I feel like, it's on my resume now. I learned a lot about Facebook, going live, being in control of a Facebook page, just different social media things I'm interested in. So, it worked out. It was free but it was like an internship. Like it's free, but I still learned a lot. So, the value was worth it in the end.

Black women producing free content to gain exposure and experience, and them accepting free hair products and tools in exchange for labor highlight the prevalence of hope and aspirational labor in the natural hair vlogging industry. According to Duffy (2017), female digital content creators produce unpaid digital content, including vlogs, that will help bolster their success and one day lead to a career that can support their lifestyle and family. This unpaid labor by women is “motivated by passion and the infectious rhetoric of entrepreneurialism” (Duffy, 2017, p. 15). In Asia’s use of the word “internship” to describe her experience managing the Facebook natural hair group aligns with the experiences of public relations interns who describe their aspirational labor as “bitch work” (Rodino-Colocino & Berberick, 2015). However, similarly to intern work, it appears that this aspirational labor creates openings for bias and discriminatory experiences for Black women in the vlogging industry.

Despite reaching high levels of success in the natural hair vlogging industry and recognizing pay disparities, some Black female natural hair vloggers still accept free hair products or tools as compensation or accept low pay. This acceptance of free products as compensation or low pay depends on whether the vlogger perceives there is a personal benefit or a financial dire need. Sarah explained that while she does have concerns of pay disparity in the natural hair vlogging industry, she still may accept low or unfair pay. She said:

They definitely come to you with a set price, and it's your choice to either say yes or no, like, "I won't accept this," or "This, okay, I'll accept." Like, "I really need the money right

now." So, it's kind of like, it fluctuates. So, if I'm in a position to where I really wanna go on a vacation, but they're not gonna pay me as much as I normally would want, it's like, "Okay, I might give in."

Accepting pay inequality impacts Black women across the industry. There is an overwhelming burden placed on Black women to demand equal and fair pay in the natural hair vlogging industry because of the negative effects that accepting unfair pay may have on Black women. Black women argue that by accepting unfair pay in the natural hair vlogging industry, they are hindering Black female natural hair vloggers overall by taking away their leverage to pursue and negotiate fair and equal pay, which may lead to more discrimination and biases against Black women. Although Sarah acknowledged that she will occasionally produce content for compensation that is not comparable to her rates, she recognized that this may hurt Black women in the industry. She said:

Also, that does hurt other people because when other people put their prices out there, you don't wanna be low-balled. You don't want them to low-ball anybody else. Like, "[vlogger's name], she's bigger than you, but she accepted less money. So that even though you're even more of a micro-influencer, there's no way I'm gonna pay you as much as her. And she'll accept this." So, in a way, I try to stick to what my rates are because I know it'll help other influencers out there get their rates approved. But there's times when it gets tight.

In addition to Black female natural hair vloggers' concern that their acceptance of unfair compensation will have negative effects for other Black women across the vlogging industry, Black women also shared their own experiences of how they have been negatively impacted when Black women undercharge for their digital services. Tierra said:

I mainly go based off of what other YouTubers are saying, but it's even hard then because there are some where you come across who are bigger than you but they're still asking for the same prices that you're asking for. So that doesn't really help you, it doesn't help smaller people 'cause it's like, "Girl, you got this much and you are only asking for that little bit and I'm trying to ask for the same thing that you... But you should be asking for more."

Black women have had their rates challenged because of low rates set by other Black female natural hair vloggers. According to Black women, these rates should be higher and comparable to the women's success. Jada said:

So, if another YouTuber is saying, "Oh, I'll do all of this content for \$200." It's like, "Okay, well, I'm saying I'll do all of this content for \$1000." It's like, "Oh, your prices are too high." And it's not necessarily that my prices are too high, it's just the other YouTuber doesn't know their worth, doesn't know the value of the content they're providing, so they don't charge enough. People, they just don't know their worth. They don't know what to charge, and it kinda like brings down the bar for everyone.

This highlights the communal bond and devotion that exists between Black women (Neal-Barnett et al., 2011).

4.2.2 Discrimination impacts vloggers' business partnerships with hair care brands

Business partnerships also lead to earned revenue and exposure for Black female natural hair vloggers. The second form of bias and discrimination that was identified in this analysis occurred through opportunities to develop business partnerships between Black female natural hair vloggers and hair care brands.

Brands' marketing strategies often utilize YouTube and working with vloggers as tactics (Dehghani et al., 2016). Many hair care brands gain recognition because of social media chatter and word of mouth (Mintel Group, 2017). Some of this chatter is curated from the business relationships hair care brands have developed with Black female natural hair vloggers to showcase the hair care brands' products and tools. These business relationships can include opportunities for vloggers to attend events and even travel on trips. Deja described experiences of not receiving as many opportunities to develop business relationships with hair care brands as other Black female natural hair opportunities although she has twice as many subscribers. In this industry, subscribers are considered capital that helps determine the success of vloggers. Deja noted:

I feel like I haven't had as much opportunities. Because I have close to 20,000 subscribers now, but I've seen people with like 10,000 subscribers go on brand trips. It's a bit disheartening.

Vloggers reflect that opportunities and compensation should be granted and determined by the level of success a vlogger has reached and the size of their social network. Kim (2020) argues that the size of one's network following can have significant tangible effects for marketing strategies. However, some hair care brands seem to reject this arguably successful marketing strategy in exchange for the racist and sexist practices they are exhibiting. Deja recognized that although she had significantly more YouTube subscribers than other vloggers, the hair care brand used a different criterion to invite other Black female natural hair vloggers on their brand trip. Deja attributed missing out on the opportunity to work with the hair care brand to texture discrimination. She described her hair texture as "kinky" and when using the hair

typing system, she characterized it as within the Type 4 category. Deja reflected on the experience and said:

I definitely won't get a lot of people reaching out to me as I would if I had a different hair texture. I understand that. I mean I don't feel down because of that. I'm just happy to share my tips and help people with their hair. But I am very well aware of the texture discrimination and the lack of opportunities that natural hair will offer me.

My interviews suggest that hair care brands prefer developing business partnerships with Black women who have looser curl patterns in their hair texture, which is a form of texture discrimination. Texture discrimination is an element of colorism based on the natural texture of one's hair (Keith & Monroe, 2016). Colorism uplifts and privileges physical features of a Eurocentric phenotype such as straight and longer hair (Mathews & Johnson, 2015; Ryabov, 2013). Colorism can affect employment and education opportunities (Mathews & Johnson, 2015). There are even gaps in income between light-skinned and dark-skinned Black Americans, where those with lighter skin earn higher incomes (Keith & Monroe, 2016).

When hair typing, the texture of hair that vloggers believe hair care brands treat more favorably typically falls within the Type 3 hair category. While hair textures within the Type 3 category are not straight, these hair textures are the closest to straight hair while still be considered natural hair. Deja noted:

I would definitely say that I have noticed is natural hair companies tend to gravitate towards vloggers with 3 Type hair. I will say that even though a lot of their consumers are people with 4 Type hair. They definitely put that that 3-type person in the forefront of their Instagram or constantly inviting them out to events and things like that.

Curly hair textures, a type of texture that is often categorized as Type 3 hair, was identified again as the type of hair textures that hair care brands prefer working with over kinky hair textures.

Kathryn said:

The girl with the curly little ringlets, and the little curl that big on circles, they get the most engagement, and they get the most brands that reach out to them because it's easy and it looks beautiful, it's appealing to the eye. So, they really do get more gigs than the girls with the 4C hair.

Kathryn also shared her belief that Black female natural hair vloggers are discriminated against in their quest to develop business partnerships with hair care brands based on hair texture. She believed that the hair texture that is most discriminated against is kinky and coily hair textures. When using the hair typing system, the texture of hair is categorized as Type 4 hair. Kathryn said:

Yeah, [hair care brands] don't wanna work with [vloggers with 4C type hair] 'cause, it's kinda, probably difficult for them to deal with. They're trying to make them look beautiful and appealing in their eyes, I guess.

There are various reasons why hair care brands may choose to work with Black female natural hair vloggers who have finer hair textures and hair textures with looser curl patterns, also known as Type 3 hair. Such biased situations reflect the hierarchy of race as well as the debate of “good” vs. “bad” hair (Robinson, 2011). Kathryn shared why she believes hair care brands preference some looser curls over kinkier hair textures, which also is supported by the “good” vs. “bad” hair debate. She said:

Yeah, 'cause I feel like the reason why they get more gigs because once you put that product in the girl... I work with hair, so I know how it is. When she put the product in a girl with like curls, they have like 3C, 4A hair is the curls come out, right? The hair is elongated. It looks beautiful in their eyes. That's beautiful for them. But what it was for me and they, they called me for a gig, they will have to style my hair, either dry or... If they do put in spray then it will shrink, it will disappear. So, working with my kind of texture is tricky for certain brands because they don't wanna deal with the hard... It's too hard kinda thing so that's definitely one thing that I can say that we 4C girls go through.

The elongation of hair strands can lead to the appearance of a looser curl pattern and of finer hair texture. Substances such as water and certain hair products can be applied to elongate hair strands. This method is also called stretching (V. Davis, 2018). However, it is possible for tighter curl patterns such as kinky and coily textures to shrink when moisture is applied to the hair strands. Kathryn's argument above is that because tighter curl patterns like those that are considered coarse or kinky do not easily elongate as other hair textures and do not give the appearance of looser curls, hair care brands do not want to work with these women. Since hair texture closely correlates with skin color (Keith & Monroe, 2016), the argument can also be made that hair care brands have biases against skin color as well as hair texture and choose not to develop business partnerships with darker skinned Black women with more coarse and kink hair textures, also known as Type 4 hair. When hair care brands preference working with lighter skin women with Type 3 hair, this is indicative of the "new global beauty," which Hunter (2005) defines as "old fashioned, white beauty repackaged with dark hair" (p. 57). Women of color without Eurocentric features still cannot reach this specific type of beauty. It also speaks to the

hooks' (1992) concept of Otherness being exploited, while still trying to maintain the status quo even in a space that has been originally created to support and uplift Black women.

Carly shared a similar sentiment about opportunities in the natural hair vlogging industry with hair care brands being allotted to Black women with looser curl textures. Again, this is the avoidance of centering Otherness (hooks, 1992). She added to the argument that it is not just specific hair textures that cause Black women in the industry to be discriminated against, but also skin color. However, her experiences come from the opposite perspective. Carly believed that some of her success in developing business partnerships with hair care brands occurred because of her lighter skin complexion and looser curl pattern. When using the hair typing system, she placed her hair texture in the Type 3 category. Carly said:

I think that it was a lot easier for me because I'll be honest because of my skin color and because of my hair texture. I think so. I definitely think so. I think that my curls are acceptable to most people. I think that someone with a tighter curl texture would be discriminated against way more than I ever would be or could be, someone with browner skin. But I definitely think that there's a privilege, I have an upper hand because my curls are looser, and people want my curls.

Carly recognizes the privilege granted to her in the natural hair vlogging industry because of her lighter skin complexion and looser curl pattern.

4.2.3 Disparity in social media representation from hair care brands

The discussion of discrimination against darker skin Black female natural hair vloggers also appears in the third form of discrimination found, which is a disparity of social media representation. Hair care brands and well-known hair blogs often showcase natural hair vloggers'

images on their social media accounts, including Instagram. Instagram is a social networking platform used to showcase digital content (Instagram, 2020). While videos can be posted to the platform, it is primarily known for posting photos and images. When hair care brands and well-known hair blogs post photos and videos of Black female natural hair vloggers to Instagram, this action increases exposure for vloggers, which can lead to an increased number of YouTube channel subscribers.

Black female natural hair vloggers notice that hair care brands and natural hair vlogs prefer posting photos of certain hair textures consistently more than other hair textures on their social media platforms. Kathryn noticed that not only does she see fewer photos of Black women with coarse and kinky hair texture, also known, as Type 4 hair, she usually sees only women with 4C hair highlighted if they have a longer length of hair. She said:

Do you know those little pages that have... That repost other naturals, they rarely post those girls [with short 4C hair]. I'm like, "You don't have to have long beautiful 4C hair to be posted." Everybody that have 4C hair whether it's long, medium length or tailbone length needs to be posted and showcase all beauty of 4C hair.

Kathryn also commented that in addition to Black women with a certain hair textures primarily being showcased on social media, Black women with lighter skin complexions tend to be posted more on these particular social media pages. She said:

But I do notice that I don't see a lot of melanated darker skin tone working with a lot of brands and if they do have someone that do work with them that's dark skinned and melanated, it's somebody with a lot of followers.

When Kathryn began to recognize that hair care brands and well-known hair blogs consistently post Black women with lighter skin complexions on their social media accounts, she made assumptions about how hair care brands work with Black women based on their social media behavior. She noted:

I would say on Instagram with colored brands, I feel like they don't work with a lot of dark-skins, dark-skinned ladies, melanin ladies.

Carly, who describes herself her skin color as a light complexion and her hair as a texture with looser curls, also noted that she recognizes a certain type of Black women being highlighted and showcased on social media. From what she has seen, she feels that Black women who are lighter with looser curls are appreciated more than brown and darker skinned women with coarser textures of hair. She said:

I feel like I've seen on social media a lot, that the brown skinned girls don't get the love that the light skinned girls do. The brown skin girl has short natural hair, it's nappy. My hair has never been described as nappy, never, never.

4.3 Natural Hair Vlogger Discrimination Lore

In addition to vloggers' recollections of their own experiences of bias and discrimination in the natural hair vlogging industry, second and third-hand stories of these experiences against Black women saturate the industry. While I argue that the believed safe space of the natural hair vlogging industry is a site for discrimination and bias against Black women, the finding of the prevalence of second- and third-hand accounts of discrimination and bias questions whether natural hair vlogs truly are a safe space at all for Black women. Accounts of discriminatory experiences are passed between Black women, and Black women who claim they have not

experienced bias and discrimination firsthand still know of women who have been the victim of discriminatory practices and bias. Black women have seen and heard women discuss their experiences on public platforms such as social media pages, blog posts, and vlogs. Some of the stories about discrimination are vague. For example, Deja heard that Black women in the natural vlogging industry experience an overall feeling of not being accepted within the industry. She said:

But there is a lot of discrimination with other people, I've been told, about just who they are naturally and them not accepting or liking it when they're a Black company as well.

Another recollection that discussed discrimination in the natural hair vlogging industry without giving specific details came from Tierra. Although she did not provide a specific event, she characterized discrimination in the industry as "horrible." Tierra said:

I've seen horror stories. I've seen stories about, not necessarily hair brands, but just brands in general, that kind of discrimination towards different vloggers.

Other participants shared more detailed stories about discrimination. Kathryn recounted a video she watched online from a vlogger she knows. The video highlighted an experience where the vlogger was treated differently because of the texture of her hair. Kathryn said:

I know there was a vlogger. Her hair's 4C. I can't remember her exact name, but I was watching one of her videos, and she went to a gig, and they had to do her hair. The person that would do her hair did not know how to deal with it, and they couldn't really style her hair as she would. So, she tried to take over and told the lady, "If you can't do my hair, it's okay. Probably try to get some classes on how to do natural hair," and the lady was like, "Your hair is so poor, so there's not much I can really do," and stuff like that.

This account highlights how certain hair textures of Black women are still viewed as an oddity even within the natural hair vlogging industry. Black women are ridiculed when people are unfamiliar with their texture and are made to feel as if something is wrong with their hair texture. The debate around “good vs. bad” places coarse and kinky hair textures on the “bad” spectrum. The above interaction between the vlogger with 4C hair and the stylist at the event seem to reinforce this ideology of what makes hair consider “bad.” The stylist was unfamiliar with how to style this type of hair texture and instead of acknowledging her unfamiliarity, she ridiculed the vlogger for having “poor” hair.

Kathryn shared another example of a vlogger with 4C-type hair receiving negative comments from subscribers, followers, and other audience members on her Instagram page when she posted photos of her hair texture appearing tighter than usual and lacked the appearance of elongation. Kathryn said:

There was a post on Instagram, where this girl... I will have to go back to that post and see, but there was this girl that posted a picture with her hair shrunken, and they was going crazy on her hair like they was talking crazy mess about how ugly her hair was.

Jada also shared her perception that coarse and kinky hair is not viewed as “good:”

But I know with 4C textures, they are the 4C vloggers, they have said a lot of things about people embracing natural hair, but not embracing my natural hair kind of a thing. I know that's a conversation.

4.4 Vloggers Anticipate More Discrimination and Bias as Their Success Grows

Due to the bias and discrimination that Black female natural hair vloggers experience firsthand and hear from others in the natural hair vlogging industry, Black women anticipate that

as their success continues to grow as natural hair vloggers that they will experience more discrimination and bias. The finding of Black women's anticipation of being discriminated against paired with the prevalence of second- and third-hand accounts of discrimination and bias questions whether Black women truly believe the natural hair community is a space for Black women to embrace their natural hair texture. Black women assume that as they become more successful as Black female natural hair vloggers they will experience discrimination from both white hair care brands and more well-known brands. Kathryn said:

So maybe in the future when I work with another brand... The bigger I get, if I were to work with a white-owned brand, maybe, I'd probably experience something like that.

This expectation is not surprising when we reflect on the "good vs. bad" hair debate and the hierarchy of race. Black female natural hair vloggers believe that white-owned hair care brands will prefer hair texture and skin complexion that is closer to whiteness. They also expect the same for well-known and more successful hair care brands. Black female vloggers believe that the larger a brand is the more the brand will prefer working with women who are in a closer proximity to whiteness. Asia said:

I feel like the bigger brands that I work with are probably more strict on who they work with and what they want to show face, so it could even come down to the color of my skin, honestly. "We want a light-skin girl with loose, curly hair. Has to have this appearance." I feel like they're very more picky on who they choose. The bigger companies are just trying to show face with a certain face.

Black female natural hair vloggers do not make these assumptions lightly. They speak to other vloggers in the industry to learn about their experiences. They pay attention to the

campaigns that hair care brands launch and recognize that hair care brands are primarily working with natural hair vloggers with specific hair textures and skin color. Asia said:

It's just kind of seeing campaigns... Let's say, was it DevaCurl? I just kind of see like who constantly gives deals, versus others. I think Ulta doing some campaign, I don't know what brand, they were just doing a beauty campaign and they picked this woman called [vlogger's name], and she has really loose curls, and she's pretty, she's got a really loose curl texture, and it's just kind of like her. I keep seeing her get brand deals versus my like my kinkier girls are like not as much. But they have the same amount of followers as [vlogger]. Just as pretty, just as eloquently speaking like. But she gets billed more than like the kinkier type do. Yeah. She had a whole billboard campaign with Ulta and like her picture was up. I don't really see that too much with my tighter textured girls. I feel like even subtle things like that, I'm noticing, like, why didn't they pick so-and-so, she's cute, like she has curly hair you know what I mean, so I'm noticing that kind of... I don't know if there is a purpose behind it, but just me being on the outside is just kinda like, "Interesting".

4.5 Fears of Blacklisting as a Black Female Natural Hair Vlogger

Although Black female natural hair vloggers recognize the bias and discrimination they face in the natural hair vlogging industry, many are afraid to speak out in fear of being blacklisted by hair care brands, alienating audiences, and perpetuating negative Black stereotypes. Numerous negative stereotypes exist about Black women. Black women are labeled as “the angry Black woman,” “Jezebel,” “the mammy,” and more (Lewis et al., 2016). Asia feared being labeled with attributes from stereotypes. She said:

Because I feel like people are loud about it, some people are, but I'm just still learning so much. I just don't wanna like yell too loud yet I just hate yelling and being, not ignorant, but just not 100% what I want to say yet so I just wanna like... I talk in the community, I talk to the girls about it, the circle, we talk about it, but I don't tell my audience about it too much, unless they ask me, but no. Not too many people ask those questions but... Not too loud, yeah.

The “angry Black woman” stereotype portrays Black women as being unnecessarily mad, loud, and ignorant (Lewis et al., 2016). Although Asia did not directly state the stereotype, she did describe characteristics that align with being an “angry Black woman.”

Tierra also shared why she does not use her platform to speak out against bias and discrimination in the natural vlogging industry. Similar to Deja, she described characteristics of the “angry Black woman” stereotype. Tierra said:

Probably because of the way how, one, my viewers will perceive me. And I just don't... It's like you're damned if you do, you're damned if you don't. If you do it, you look like, "These black women, they're always complaining about something. They can't just have something or whatever and be happy about it." Or if you don't say something, it's like, "Well, does she agreed with that or does she not care or?"

Tierra shared that in addition to fear of being stereotyped by speaking up, she feared she would be blacklisted by hair care brands in the industry. Even though she argues that bias and discrimination against Black women is an important issue, Tierra believed that being vocal on the issue would make her appear “problematic” to hair care brands, which would increase the number of business relationships that she would develop in the future. Without these business

relationships, she would not be able to earn the compensation and exposure that leads to a successful career as a natural hair vlogger. She explained:

And then when brands look at your videos and they see that you speak up about things, sometimes they don't wanna work with you, or they think, "She might be problematic," or, "Do we want this girl to represent the face of our brand?" So it's a lot of things you have to think about when you wanna just say what you wanna say. And it sucks, but it is stuff that you have to think about. Because if you're treating it as a business and not just something that you do for fun, you really have to look at it as, "Is this gonna ruin my chances with certain companies?" But then also, you have to be like, "If this company feels that I'm this and I'm that, then I shouldn't be working with them. Forget them." So I don't know. I feel like it's just getting the courage to put yourself out there and being okay with what happens or what doesn't happen too.

Due to this fear of being stereotyped and blacklisted in the industry, Tierra is careful about the controversial things she speaks out about on her platform. While she does discuss opinions that she believes to be unpopular, she does not speak directly about bias and discrimination in attempt not to cross an unspoken line. Tierra said:

I've participated in natural hair unpopular opinions, things where you feel like people won't necessarily always agree with you, but you share anyway. That's probably the furthest I've gone into saying something that's not the norm. I'm in a weird space about that, how I wanna go about just talking about touchy subjects on my channel just yet.

Conclusion. The thematic analysis found that Black female natural hair vloggers experience bias and discrimination through compensation, the development of business partnerships with hair

care brands, and social media representation from natural hair groups and hair care brands. In addition to vloggers' descriptions of discriminatory experiences, themes emerged around how these experiences have saturated the industry. Black female natural hair vloggers anticipate being discriminated against in the vlogging industry because of the saturation of second- and third-hand accounts of discrimination and bias. However, despite the concern expressed around discrimination and bias from Black female natural hair vloggers, vloggers convey fear around being blacklisted in the vlogging industry if they speak out against it. While Chapter 4 examines the discourse around discrimination and bias in the natural hair vlogging industry, Chapter 5 takes a different direction focus by discussing the presence of racism and colorism in Black female natural hair vloggers' descriptions of themselves and other Black women with natural hair.

Chapter 5: The Role of Racism and Colorism

The analysis in Chapter 4 revealed themes associated with bias and discrimination that Black female natural hair vloggers experience in the natural hair vlogging industry: pay discrimination, developing business partnerships with hair care brands, and social media representation. I argue that the discriminatory practices and bias that Black women experience in the natural hair vlogger industry have significant influence on the way that Black female natural hair vloggers describe themselves and other Black women with natural hair.

In Chapter 4, I argued that Black female natural hair vloggers do experience various forms of discrimination and bias within the natural vlogging industry. The thematic analysis conducted in this study also reveal several themes around how Black female natural hair vloggers describe themselves and other Black women with natural hair. This correlates with the preexisting literature about the effects of racism and colorism.

In Chapter 5, I argue that the discrimination and bias revealed in this study originated from the racism and colorism that have existed in the United States for centuries and then examine how racism and colorism reveal itself in the descriptions of Black women and the way they describe other Black women. Racism and colorism are intertwined throughout almost every systemic institution in the United States. Racism and colorism can affect one's socioeconomic status (Keith & Monroe, 2016; Williams, 1999). There are also psychological effects that Black women experience from hair discrimination, which is based on racism and colorism (Mbilishaka et al., 2020).

5.1 Racist and Discriminatory Practices are Internalized by Black Women

I argue that the racist and colorist discriminatory practices and biases from the natural hair vlogging industry that were presented in Chapter 4 reveal itself in the way Black female natural hair vloggers describe themselves and other Black women with natural hair. One theme revealed in this study is that the most coarse and kinky hair texture, also referred to Type 4 hair textures when using the hair typing system, is not considered as attractive as other hair textures by both women who have this specific texture and other Black women who have other natural hair textures. A second theme revealed is that not only is the hair typing system the most prevalent way to describe one's hair texture within the natural hair vlogging industry, but this system may promote strained relationships and divisions between Black women with different natural hair textures. Finally, the analysis revealed that Black women consider longer hair more attractive and assume women with long hair have a closer proximity to whiteness.

5.2 The Coarser the Hair, The Lesser the Beauty

Racism and colorism reveal itself in the way Black women view the most coarse and kinky hair textures. Natural hair textures of Black women vary widely across the spectrum. One's hair texture can be very curly or have a pattern with loose curls. This type of hair is often found in the Type 3 category of the hair typing system. There are three subsequent hair types within this category: Types 3A, 3B, and 3C (What's My Hair Type, n.d.). Hair texture also can be extremely coarse or kinky, which is often found in the Type 4 category of the hair typing system. There are also three subsequent hair sub-categories: Types 4A, 4B, and 4C. The analysis revealed that Black women, those who have the most coarse and kinky texture of hair and those who do not do not consider it as attractive as other hair textures by both Black women with natural hair and Black women who do have this texture of hair. Although none of the participants

directly said that they did not view coarse and kinky hair as less attractive than looser curl patterns, when describing their own hair texture, whether it was coarse and kinky or a looser curl pattern, Black women appeared to compare and rank its qualities to curly and/or wavy hair.

When Sarah was describing her own hair texture, she explained what made her hair texture different from others. She said:

So, my hair texture is a lot of textures in one. I do have the... I am on the kinkier end of the spectrum but I also have really nice curls and coils, and I do have that elongation that I know a lot of people want in their hair journey, so I just have a little bit of... Well, on the scale of curl patterns, I'd say that I am 3B to 4A.

In her description of her hair texture, she started by saying that she was “on the kinkier end of the spectrum.” However, she immediately clarified that while she does consider her hair to be kinky, it does have some positive attributes. Sarah clarified by adding, “but I also have really nice curls and coils.” By adding the word “but” and the phrase “it does have some positive attributes,” the participant appears to be negating her own self-description of having kinky hair by explaining she still has a good hair texture because of the “really nice curls and coils.” Black women have internalized the discriminatory practices and bias against natural hair that they experience and witness. This internalization has turned into aggression not only against Black women’s own image of themselves, but the images of other Black women (hooks, 1992).

The internalization of the negative treatment of coarser and kinkier hair has led to Black women speaking about other Black women in undesirable terms. When describing her own hair texture, Carly said:

I would say I have between tight and loose curls. I know a lot of people use the scale like 4C or 3B. I don't really know, I guess I'd be like in the further down 3's, like a three, whatever. But I feel like a lot people get hung up on the hair texture thing, so I just never really paid attention. But yeah, I would say between tight and wavy.

With her own hair texture of loose curls, Carly discussed the discrimination and bias that Black women with more coarse and kinky hair textures and darker skin complexion have in the natural hair vlogging industry and gave examples of bias and discrimination that these women experience. In one of her recollections of the bias that Black women experience in the natural hair vlogging industry, she referred to a Black woman's hair as "nappy." She said:

I just... I feel like I've seen on social media a lot, that the brown skinned girls don't get the love that the light skinned girls do. The brown skin girl has short natural hair, it's nappy.

My hair has never been described as nappy, never, never.

It is not rare for Black women's hair texture to be called "nappy." Robinson (2011) noted that course, kinky, and coily hair textures are sometimes referred to as "nappy." However, while some Black women have embraced the term "nappy," others have rejected the negative connotation of the term (Lester, 2000; Mercer, 1987; Neil & Mbilishaka, 2019; Robinson, 2011; White, 2005). Black women have also been referred to as "nappy-headed" (Neil & Mbilishaka, 2019).

When Carly first refers to brown skin girls as having nappy hair, the connotation is unclear. However, when she made the distinction that her own hair has never been called nappy, we know that her use of it has a negative connection. By her own description of her own hair texture as

Type 3, we know that Carly is referring to coarse and kinky textures, hair that is categorized as Type 4, as nappy.

In addition to Black women with curly and looser curl patterns internalizing negative images about Black women and regurgitating some of the negative language spoken about coarser and kinkier hair texture, Black women with the most coarse and kinky hair texture also have internalized these discriminatory experiences and bias and speak negatively about their own hair texture. When Kathryn describes her own hair texture, which is coarse and kinky, she describes it in an overwhelmingly positive light. She said:

My hair texture is definitely 4C, it's kinky, it's coily, it's coarse. All the great stuff that the natural hair... Needs to know about. Yes, so that's how I describe my hair. It's just very kinky and coily.

However, as she continues to speak about her hair texture, she begins to make certain comments that reveal she may have also been influenced by the hierarchy of race and the “good vs. bad” hair debate, and internalized the discrimination and bias she has experienced. Kathryn shared:

I look good, I'm a bad B, okay? And I make my hair look good with me. So there's nothing you can come to me and say that is gonna hurt me, 'cause you know I look good because my hair is 4C and I still look good, and I carry that 4C hair with confidence.

Kathryn's initial comments about her coarse hair texture differs from Sarah and Carly's. Kathryn describes this hair texture using positives characteristics. She uses the same language when sharing how she uses her vlogs to educate about the beauty of coarse and kinky hair. This reflects how the online natural hair community uses digital tool to resist Western beauty standards

(Sobande, 2017). However, although Kathryn describes her coarse and kinky hair texture with pride, her statement that “I know I look good because my hair is 4C and I still look good” appears to support the idea that having coarse and kinky hair is not in fact good hair, but that she “still looks good” even though she has this type of hair texture.

When Kathryn discussed other Black women who she knows with coarse and kinky hair, she addresses how these women lack confidence in their hair texture. She said:

So my goal was to make those girls that have coarse hair just like me be confident in wearing it, because I've been hearing a lot of girls and a lot of clients that work with corporate come to me and tell me they can't wear their hair in this section because they're not confident, they feel unkempt, they feel like they're not groomed because their hair look crazy and they feel like some other people's gonna look at them like they're not put together. So, one of my things is to really rock the crown, looking beautiful.

In another example, she shared how she straightened her own hair without heat, also known as stretching hair, to highlight her hair texture's beauty in a different form, while also showcasing the versatility of type 4C hair. This action was done to support another vlogger with 4C hair who had experienced the negativity across social platforms. Kathryn noted:

So, that made me, go and straighten my hair and be like, "This is my hair texture without it stretched without no heat, making it look big and beautiful. This is my texture and its shrinking is coarse," so I don't understand why they was going on this girl about her hair looking like a... They said her hair looked like a Brillo pad. They were just talking mess and this is 2016 where the 4C hair was not as... Was out there, 4C hair was not out there

in 2016. It was mostly now that we showcase our 4C hair, 2015, '16, nobody really showed their 4C hair because they thought it was ugly.

Kathryn's own experience of straightening her hair without heat to make it "look big and beautiful" reiterates that Black women who experience or witness texture discrimination and bias oftentimes internalize these biases and discriminatory practices. This supports the ideology that Black hair in its natural state is seen as "unprofessional, unkempt, messy, or unacceptable" (Dawson et al., 2019, p. 390). However, in addition to white people's beliefs that Black hair is unkempt or of lesser quality, Black women who have coarse and kinky hair textures also have been influenced by this ideology and think negatively about their own hair texture.

Asia further highlighted that Black women they do not like their own natural hair texture and do not find it aesthetically beautiful. She enjoys being a natural hair vlogger because, similarly to Kathryn, she enjoys teaching other Black women to embrace their own natural hair texture. Asia said:

I like teaching about hair, it's fun. I enjoy it, and I want people to actually love their natural hair cause that's still like a thing, that's a really big thing, like people just do not like their natural hair, it actually blows me away, just... "It's just so difficult." It's like, it's not, you just need to learn about it, and it's trial and error.

Asia's suggestion that natural hair is difficult to manage and maintain continues to support the ideology of the "good vs. bad" hair debate because "bad" hair is considered challenging to care for, comb, manipulate, and maintain (Dawson et al., 2019). It also leads to the characterization of coarse and kinky hair as nappy.

Deja shared conversations she has had with other Black women that she characterizes as “problematic” because the women directly uplift the “good vs. bad” hair debate when discussing their own experiences with their hair. In these conversations, Black women uplift certain hair textures while undermining their own. Deja said:

“You got good hair.” Or “I wish my hair did that.” That to me shows that you don’t really love your hair like that.

These statements highlight that in addition to Black women internalizing the ideology around “bad” hair, they also are using its direct terminology. Not only are they uplifting certain hair types, but they outwardly share that they believe their hair may not be considered as good as others. Previously, Tierra had a difficult time embracing her own natural hair texture. She describes her hair texture as being between Type 3C hair and Type 4A hair. She said:

The texture itself, it's coarse, but I would say on a medium range of coarse. It's not the coarsest, but somewhere in between. It's not exactly fine, but it still has a little bit of silkiness to it too.

Black women distinguishing between “good and bad hair” when discussing their own hair texture and other Black women’s hair was a significant theme. Tierra was initially apprehensive about transitioning from straightened hair to her own hair texture. She was not sure if she would still feel beautiful while wearing her own natural hair texture. She noted:

I never really saw myself wearing my hair curly and still feeling completely beautiful too. I don't know, Yeah. I think that's also why I wanted to do it too. I just wanted to see like, "Am I still gonna like myself seeing my hair the way how it grows, and the way how it's supposed to be?" This is how I feel like I'm supposed to look now.

Before wearing her natural hair texture, Tierra wore her hair primarily straight. It was straightened using heat mechanisms, which led to heat damage. Heat damage is caused by applying too much heat or too high of a temperature to hair, which then transforms the hair shaft (Edwards, 2015). When the shaft is damaged or altered, the hair strand's original curly, coarse, or kinky pattern is permanently straightened. Despite the heat damage she had, Tierra felt beautiful. This technique and others are similar to the methods Black women used centuries ago to manipulate their hair into having Eurocentric features (Byrd & Tharps, 2001; Hamilton, 2019; Johnson & Bankhead, 2014; National Museum of African American History & Culture, n.d.).

Even though Tierra now embraces her coarse hair texture, she was not initially sure if she would feel beautiful while wearing it. However, when describing her hair texture, Tierra says that her hair texture is not the “coarsest.” This does raise question if she would embrace her hair texture if it were coarser.

In discussing her own similar transition story between consistently wearing straightened hair to her natural hair texture, Kiara made comments that also reveal an internalization of racism and colorism. She said:

I started transitioning in, I think 2014, and then I cut all my natural hair out in 2015. I mean, all my permed hair off in 2015. And then I was just like, I don't know what to do with my hair. I need help. So, I went to YouTube looking at videos. And then I finally figured away to style my hair, to make it look decent, to not have it always looking so dry, more moisturized.

Her use of the term “decent” here promotes the ideology that coarse and kinky hair textures are considered bad because of its level of difficulty to manage and what is considered acceptable.

Both Tierra and Kiara's journeys of their transition to their natural hair texture reflects the emotional process of decolonizing from racist ideologies (Norwood, 2018). However, the way these women describe their journeys in retrospect show that the internalization of their experiences has had lasting effects (hooks, 1992).

Kathryn is aware that people view the quality of coarse and kinky hair as less than curly hair. When styling and caring for her own hair, Kathryn does not just want to look good, but she wants people to believe that her hair, with its coarse and kinky texture, looks just as good as curly hair. She shared:

You could still look put together with, your natural hair, whether it be coarse and kinky because I noticed that the looser your curl the more accepted you are and the more tighter your curl the less views you get and the less engagement you get, because they think it's not as beautiful as the girl with the curly hair. So, I always wanted to make sure that my hair is kinky and I still look good just as much as we think the girl with the curly hair looks good too.

Racism and colorism not only reveal itself in the way Black women discuss coarse and kinky hair in private with other Black women. Negative comments are made publicly about and directly to Black women with coarse and kinky hair within public forums in the natural hair industry. While vloggers primarily post their videos on YouTube, they also promote their digital content on other social media platforms to expand their audience and increase their channel subscribers. Kathryn discussed some of the negativity that coarse and kinky hair textures receive across social media. She said:

There was a post on Instagram, where this girl... I will have to go back to that post and see, but there was this girl that posted a picture with her hair shrunken, and they was going crazy on her hair like they was talking crazy mess about how ugly her hair was. So, that made me, go and straighten my hair and be like, "This is my hair texture without it stretched without no heat, making it look big and beautiful. This is my texture and its shrinking, is coarse."

It is clear by the negative descriptions of coarse and kinky hair given by Black women that they have internalized racist and colorist ideologies throughout the years. When Black women describe their own hair textures or discuss textures that are coarser and kinkier in nature, they use negative descriptors and regurgitate concepts from these ideologies. Some Black women recognize the impact that these racist and colorist ideologies have on the overall view of natural hair, even within the Black community. Jada noted:

I think the boxes though, like the texture discrimination boxes, existed prior to the natural hair community and the vlogging space where we are on YouTube. That was already in existence way before we hopped on screen and said, "Hey, guys, this is what my hair looks like." And so I think in the African-American community, but just in the African diaspora period, it's still very Eurocentric standards of beauty that have seeped their way into what we consider pretty, or desirable, or easy, or manageable.

5.3 Length Adds Beauty and Proximity to Whiteness

The analysis also revealed that there is a form of disbelief about Black women who have long natural hair that comes from Black women and from women of other races. When hair is longer, it is seen as more attractive and believed to represent a closer proximity to Whiteness.

Jada shared how her identification of blackness was challenged by another Black woman because of the longer length of her hair.

I was at the nail salon and a woman was like, "Oh, is that your real hair?" Because it was blown out, my hair was blown out. She's like, "Is that your real hair?" And I was like, "Yeah," and she was like, "Oh, what are you mixed with?" and I was like, "Black and some more black. That's it." And she was like, "How come it's that long?" And I was like, "It's just my hair that's, you know, black women can have long hair." And she's like, "Oh, no, you're mixed, you just don't know it, you're mixed with something, and you just don't know it." And I was like, and that's what I had shared in the video. And I was like, "That's not true." I don't think that was necessarily texture discrimination, but it was like, "Hey, this is the mentality of like a Black woman I ran into... A random Black woman I ran into and she doesn't believe that I'm not mixed, because the length of my hair."

The woman challenging Jada believed that because she had long hair that she had to be mixed with another race. She did not believe that Black women were able to grow out their hair. Not only is longer hair seen as ideal, but it is also associated with Western beauty standards and Eurocentric features (Banks, 2000; Patton, 2006). While Jada did acknowledge that she does not believe the woman's reaction was about texture discrimination, she did recognize that the conversation was based on the assumption of race.

During her natural hair transition process, Carly described her hair as not being aesthetically attractive. Some of the reasons she listed for her hair not being attractive was because of the length of her hair. Carly said:

So, when I did start going natural, I will say that it was a shock to a lot of people in my family. They were like, "Why are you doing that?" Because it wasn't long—pretty, it wasn't pretty loose curls. It was short, ugly heat-damaged, your hair is this high out of your scalp. So they were just like... They made fun of me, poked fun at me a little bit just like, "Oh. You look like Sideshow Bob." I didn't know who that is, now I know who it is. It's some character from... What's that show called? The Simpsons. So they would make fun of me little bit, but I was like, "Nope. Nope. I'm gonna keep growing my hair, keep growing out my hair." And as it got longer, I think that's when the compliments started. And the "Oh. It's so nice." Started, "I want curls like yours," started.

Not only did Carly call her hair short when describing why she felt it looked “ugly,” but she directly related her hair not being long with her hair not being pretty. She also associated others starting to find her hair attractive when her hair began to grow out. This reaction from others, which is influenced by racism and colorism, may have motivated her way of thinking about her natural hair. Mbilishaka et al. (2020) found that one psychological effect of texture discrimination, which Chapter 4 revealed is a major practice in the natural hair vlogging industry, is desire for long hair.

Kathryn also experienced people reacting differently to her texture of hair based on its length. However, she spoke specifically about the most coarse and kinky hair texture, which is considered 4C hair on the hair typing system. From her own experience, Kathryn believes that people only find coarse and kinky hair beautiful when its length is long. When coarse and kinky hair is short, she does not believe people find it attractive.

Only because it's long so the 4C community that has long hair looks differently from the community that has short hair. I don't know what it is with the length of 4C hair that

makes it more like, "Oh my God it's beautiful." I don't know if they think that we can't grow hair, I don't know what it is, but when they see a 4C hair vlogger with a lot of hair, they're like, "Oh my God, your hair is so beautiful."

Kathryn based this belief on the engagement and views of vloggers' digital content as well as natural hair groups across social platforms. She shared:

Let it be another vlogger that just started her journey it's like, "Oh my God her hair's ugly," or, She doesn't have that much views or engagement. Or repost from other... Do you know those little pages that have...? That repost other naturals, they rarely post those girls. I'm like, "You don't have to have long beautiful 4C hair to be posted." Everybody that have 4C hair whether it's long, medium length or tailbone length needs to be posted and showcase all beauty of 4C hair.

5.4 People “Feel Some Type of Way” If You Use the Wrong Hair Type

The analysis in this dissertation found that the most prevalent way Black female natural hair vloggers use to describe and characterize their hair texture is the hair typing system created by Andre Walker. The Andre Walker Hair Typing System™ (Walker, 1998) divides hair by texture into different categories. Each category within the hair typing system represents a different hair texture and ranges between straight hair and the kinkiest and coarsest of textured hair. However,

When asked how they describe their hair texture, the majority of the vloggers defaulted to using the hair typing system. While they still included other descriptive terms, all but one vlogger used the hair typing system to describe their texture, even if they do not believe in the importance of the typing system. Carly said:

I would describe my hair texture as curly. I would say I have between tight and loose curls. I know a lot of people use the scale like 4C or 3B. I don't really know, I guess I'd be like in the further down 3's, like a three, whatever. But I feel like a lot people get hung up on the hair texture thing, so I just never really paid attention.

Some argue that hair typing is beneficial for women because identifying their hair texture allows them to personalize their care of it (Hairlicious, Inc., 2014; Lucero, 2019; Stanborough, 2019). However, the analysis revealed that the hair typing system may promote tense divisions between Black women with natural hair. Although Andre Walker is the creator of the original hair typing system, the language and terminology seems to have evolved and appear differently across the natural hair community. Jada shared:

I typically say that I'm multi-textured, so I have at least three different textures in different areas on my head. So, by the hair typing system, and that's in quotes because there's different charts floating around, there's different interpretations of what means what, so by the original hair typing chart, it is 3C, 4A and 4B. Those are my three main textures.

While people have different interpretations of the hair typing system, Black female natural hair vloggers still consistently use the overarching four categories. However, these different interpretations may contribute to the tensions that exist between Black women of different natural hair textures. This tension is supported by the idea that Black women internalize rejection and inflict that aggression on other Black women (hooks, 1992). Tierra shared a recollection of what she has seen happen when YouTube channel subscribers feel like Black female natural hair vloggers misclassify their hair texture. She said:

People do feel some type of way if you're using the 4B or 4A terms wrong, and your hair is only three's, like people would get on you in the comments and they'll be like, "No, your hair is not this, it's actually this." Because some women just feel, well, some people in general just feel like, so attached to the category, they wanna see somebody with actual 4C hair, representing 4C. Like, I don't know, it's so crazy, but it's like if you say the wrong thing, they will be, I've seen it, where they're quick to jump on you and be like, "No, that's not this. That is not this, don't say it's that. What is this?"

While unprocessed hair of Black women places them under the overall category of “natural hair,” sub-communities have begun to form around the different types of hair within the hair typing system. These groups highlight and uplift the hair textures within a specific type across social platforms. This behavior furthers the distinction between hair types. Tierra said:

When you go to certain brand's pages, like the type of women or people that they post in general, if they all have a certain hair type, you can tell like, okay, who their audience is or who they're really just trying to focus on. Like if you see a page, that's mainly posting women with looser curls or finer hair, you know that, I don't wanna say like they're being racist, but you can see there's some type of select thing that they have going on, and you see it on natural hair pages too. There're some pages that will only post very kinky-haired women because they just wanna showcase that, and then there are some pages that you'll only see, maybe lighter skin women with finer curls, and they'll call that just curly hair page or... That's where you see, I would say, the separation in hair typing.

When Black women with natural hair speak about other women with natural hair, they tend to speak about them as a part of sub-communities within natural hair. This highlights the division between Black women with different hair textures. When Asia discussed the

discrimination that women with certain hair textures experience within the natural hair vlogging industry, she said:

But [vlogger's name] gets billed more than like the kinkier type do. Yeah. [Vlogger's name] had a whole billboard campaign with Ulta and like her picture was up. I don't really see that too much with my tighter textured girls.

Black women have strong communal bonds with each other (Neal-Barnett et al., 2011). Asia's statement highlights the communal relationship she has with Black women of her specific hair texture. However, due to the separation of hair types and the discrimination and bias that certain hair textures receive, Asia does not share the same type of relationship with all Black women who have natural hair that she does with Black women who share her own hair type.

The way that Kathryn discusses Black women with the same natural hair texture as her own is similar to that of Asia. This strong communal bond between Black women appears again (Neal-Barnett et al., 2011). By referring to Black women with her hair texture as "us" instead of by the type of hair texture they possess, Kathryn is highlighting the collective bond that these women have, which was developed because of their hair texture. She said:

Yeah, [hair brand companies] don't wanna work with us 'cause, it's kinda, probably difficult for them to deal with. They're trying to make [our hair] look beautiful and appealing in their eyes, I guess.

These findings reveal that not only are there tense divisions between Black women of different hair textures, but that Black women with the same natural hair texture tend to develop a strong bond amongst each other around their specific hair type that further distinguishes the division.

The thematic analysis found that the racism and colorism that Black female natural hair vloggers have internalized resurfaces in the way these women describe themselves and other Black women. Chapter 6 will discuss the research and practical implications from Chapter 4 and 5, make practical recommendations for the natural hair vlogging industry, and discuss strategies that can be used to challenge the racism and colorism that Black female natural hair vloggers experience.

Chapter 6: Recommendations and Implications

This study seeks to understand the different forms of discrimination and bias that Black female natural hair vloggers experience and how the themes of racism and colorism are embedded in the ways these vloggers describe themselves and other Black women with natural hair. A thematic analysis was conducted on the data collected from 10 in-depth semi-structured interviews with Black female natural hair vloggers. This chapter discusses those findings as they relate to the existing literature on vlogging, digital production, discrimination in the workplace, racism, colorism, and Black identity. Following the discussion of the findings from the thematic analysis, I discuss implications and recommendations for both research and practice. I conclude with a discussion of recommendations for future research.

This study answers three research questions:

RQ1: How do Black female natural hair vloggers describe the forms of bias and discrimination that they Black female natural hair vloggers experience?

RQ2: How are themes of racism and colorism embedded in the ways Black female natural hair vloggers describe themselves and other Black women with natural hair?

RQ3: What strategies can be used to challenge the racism and colorism that Black female natural hair vloggers describe?

6.1 Key Findings

This study found multiple key findings around discrimination and bias in the natural hair vlogging industry and in the way racism and colorism have affected how Black female natural vloggers describe themselves and other Black women. Although some of these vloggers reject

the idea that they have been discriminated against in the vlogging industry, upon elaboration they described discrimination and bias they have experienced. The analysis revealed three themes around the forms of discrimination and bias Black female natural hair vloggers: 1) pay discrimination, 2) development of businessmen partnerships with hair care brands, and 3) social media representation.

Not only do Black female natural hair vloggers experience discrimination and bias, but the thematic analysis also revealed that the vlogging industry is saturated with second and third-person accounts of discriminated against Black women in the industry. Due to their own experiences and second and third-person accounts of discrimination in the industry, Black female natural hair vloggers anticipate experiencing more discrimination and bias as they become more successful. If they speak out against these discriminatory practices and bias, they believe they will be blacklisted in the industry.

The thematic analysis also revealed that Black women do not find coarser and kinkier hair textures as attractive as they do other hair textures. Black women tend to perceive longer lengths of hair as more beautiful and as having a closer proximity to whiteness. Finally, the thematic analysis revealed that although the hair typing system is the most prevalent way for Black female natural hair vloggers to describe their hair texture, this method may further the divide between Black women with different hair textures.

6.2 Reflections on Findings

While examining the forms of discrimination and bias Black female natural hair vloggers experience in the natural hair vlogging industry, I found that they experience pay discrimination, discrimination in business partnerships with hair care brands, and discrimination in social media

representation from hair care brands and other online communities. However, although these forms of bias and discrimination are experienced by vloggers, the analysis revealed that vloggers tend to reject the idea that they have been discriminated against. In this section, I reflect on the key findings and themes from Chapter 4 and Chapter 5.

6.2.1 Vloggers experience and deny discrimination and bias

Black female natural hair vloggers appear to exist in a state of cognitive dissonance. In this state, their experiences do not align with how they characterize these experiences (Griffin, 2009). Although Black female natural hair vloggers did describe experiences of discrimination and bias in the vlogging industry, when asked directly if they have been discriminated against, they rejected the idea that they had been. The disconnect between the discriminatory practices Black women experience and how they characterize these experiences appear to reflect a need to not appear as a victim of discrimination. Acknowledgement that one has experienced racism and discrimination is a very painful realization. The pain may be even more severe for those who experience guilt that they somehow caused the discrimination because they were powerless to influence the system to treat them fairly. One way to alleviate the feelings of pain, powerless, and guilt is to minimize and normalize the racist and discriminatory experiences. This process of attempts at denial will likely result in reducing cognitive dissonance. When elaborating on why she felt she had not been discriminated against, one participant explained that her level of self-confidence prevented her from experiencing discrimination. For her to acknowledge that she had experienced discrimination would, at some level, be an admission that she was at fault because her self-confidence was not high enough. Thus, she becomes an example of what Mills (2017) calls victim blaming. Rather than see herself as a victim, she minimizes and normalizes her experiences. A prevalent narrative is that racism does not cause racial discrimination, but the

action of the victim does. This message appears to be internalized by some Black women and helps them “unthink” exploitation they experience, like the interns Rodino-Colocino and Berberick studied (2015).

6.2.2 Pay discrimination

Black female natural hair vloggers consistently report experiences of pay discrimination in the natural hair vlogging industry. This theme supports a dominant concern about exploitation in the vlogging industry (Duffy, 2017). Vloggers are offered free hair products and tools as compensation. However, what makes this form of discrimination different from other vlogging industries is that Black women report the difference in treatment based on a preference for looser curly hair patterns. Thus, women with course and kinky hair textures receive less compensation. Black women experiencing pay discrimination based on the texture of their hair is supported by the historic debate and hierarchy of “good” hair (Bellinger, 2007; Bristor et al., 1995; Hamilton, 2019; Lester, 2000; Patton, 2006; Perception Institute, 2017; Robinson, 2011).

“Good” hair is identified to have more European characteristics such as looser curly hair patterns, elongated hair strands, and a softer hair texture. This preference of hair texture is also a form of colorism (Patton, 2006). Although as bell hooks (1992) points out, one way that Black women show their racial pride is by wearing their hair in its natural state to counter racial stereotypes, the natural hair vlogging industry makes it clear through pay discrimination that it embraces colorism and racial stereotypes and that Black women and their natural hair are unappealing.

Black women are willing to accept unequal pay or no compensation when creating digital content in exchange for earning exposure and gaining experience in the vlogging industry. This

is similar to the “bitch work” that public relations interns report doing (Rodino-Colocino & Berberick, 2015). This aspirational and hopeful element is also prevalent throughout the vlogging and other digital industries (Duffy, 2017; Kuehn & Corrigan, 2013). Vloggers believe that doing unpaid work early in their career will lead to financial success later. However, it is important to note that Black female natural hair vloggers expect that they will continue to receive unfair, biased treatment as they become more successful. Black women also seem to feel a sense of guilt around producing free labor or accepting unequal pay because of the impact that this may have on other Black women in the vlogging industry. This represents the informal sister circles that Black women have established out of the strong communal bond they have with each other (Neal-Barnett et al., 2011).

6.2.3 Discrimination impacts vloggers’ business partnerships with hair care brands

As with pay discrimination, Black female natural hair vloggers report being discriminated against when hair care brands are developing business relationship with vloggers. In addition to gaining further opportunities for compensation, vloggers say that business partnerships lead to opportunities to travel and attend events. However, similar to pay discrimination, Black women said they have missed out on the opportunity to development business partnerships with hair care brands because of their hair texture. The decision to work with Black women who have specific hair textures also aligns with the preference of “good” hair (Bellinger, 2007; Bristor et al., 1995; Hamilton, 2019; Lester, 2000; Patton, 2006; Perception Institute, 2017; Robinson, 2011). Thus, as these businesses do not view coarse, kinky hair as attractive, they apparently do not view women with this type of hair as representative of the audience to which the businesses want to appeal.

6.2.4 Disparity in social media representation from hair care brands

Black female natural hair vloggers view the lack of representation from hair care brands on social media as a form of discrimination. In addition to vloggers identifying this discrimination as based on hair texture, vloggers also recognize a pattern in the complexion of Black women being showcased on social media by hair care brands. Not only do natural hair vloggers view hair care brands frequently posting images of Black women with looser curly hair pattern more than coarse and kinky hair, they also distinguish a pattern in the lighter complexion of women in the images, which is another indicator of colorism in the natural hair vlogging industry. The industry appears to view women with dark skin and coarse, kinky as “bad for business” and not representative of the audience to which they want to appeal.

6.2.5 Natural hair vlogger discrimination lore

The natural hair vlogging industry is saturated with stories about the discrimination and bias that exists in the industry. While the majority of study participants did share first-hand accounts of discrimination and bias they have experienced, all of the women have heard cases of Black women being discriminated against based on their hair texture or skin complexion. Online communities of Black women with natural hair are seen as safe spaces that allow Black women to resist Western beauty standards (Sobande, 2017). However, we can see from the findings that colorism in this community still creates a hierarchy of beauty where darker skin and coarser hair are undervalued and underappreciated. Colorism among Black vloggers can have a negative impact on their communal bond and their support for each other.

The prevalence of both first-hand experiences and hear-say of discrimination have led to vloggers anticipating being discriminated against in the future as their success grows. Since the

expectation of being discriminated against in the natural hair vlogging industry is so strong, Black women may begin to accept these discriminatory practices as normal and offer no resistance because they believe these practices are unavoidable for Black women.

6.2.6 Vloggers anticipate more discrimination and bias as their success grows

Despite the discrimination Black female natural hair vloggers experience and hear about in the industry, Black women are hesitant to speak out against the discrimination they face. There is fear that hair care brands will no longer want to work with them and will alienate their audiences. Black women believe by speaking out they will be viewed as loud, hateful, and ignorant. Historically, images based on negative stereotypes have been circulated about Black women, and these images still exist today (Lewis et al., 2016). Stereotypes includes images of the mammy, a Jezebel, and most recently prevalent is the “angry Black woman” stereotype. Black women fear they will be seen as an “angry Black woman” who is difficult to work with and is unwilling to quietly continue to accept discrimination as normal behavior. The fear of being stereotyped and blacklisted is so strong that many Black women choose not to speak out about injustices they experience and witness. This particular fear of being racially stereotyped is not one that women of other races encounter.

6.2.6 The coarser the hair, the lesser the beauty

When “good” hair is defined, its characteristics align with European features. This characterization of “good” hair is influenced by the hierarchy of race that ranks whiteness as the top ranking of beauty and blackness at the bottom (Bellinger, 2007; Jeffries & Jeffries, 2014; Okazawa-Rey et al., 1986; Patton, 2006; Robinson, 2011). The hierarchy has existed since Black people in the United States were enslaved (Byrd & Tharps, 2001). This form of racism and

colorism has negatively influenced the way Black female natural hair vloggers with coarse and kinky hair describe themselves and other Black women with a similar hair texture. The belief that coarse and kinky hair is “bad” hair has been internalized by Black women. Although Black women in this study did not directly say that they find coarse and kinky hair textures less attractive than other hair textures, when describing the beauty of their own coarse and kinky hair they described their beauty as being an exception to the norm. Even when Black women who have kinky but not the coarsest hair define their texture, they pointedly distinguish the difference between their texture and the coarsest hair texture. In essence, their thinking appears to be that coarse, kinky hair is not attractive and appealing, but occasionally there are exceptions. Those exceptions include some characteristics of “good” hair, such as more manageable and not very coarse. These comments and this way of thinking unintentionally reiterate and in some circumstances support the discrimination and bias Black women experience based on the “good” vs. “bad” hair debate.

6.2.6 Length adds beauty and proximity to whiteness

In addition to having a specific hair texture, Black women believe that longer lengths of hair increase a person’s beauty. They also believe that long hair is an indicator of a Black woman being mixed with White race at some level. This is another influence of racism and colorism on how Black women view themselves and others. Black women who have Eurocentric features are seen as more beautiful with a closer proximity to Whiteness, even in a workplace this is supposed to uplift Black features. Again, their thinking seems to be that if coarse hair has some “good” hair qualities, it becomes more acceptable.

6.2.7 People “feel some type of way” if you use the wrong hair type

Black female natural hair vloggers primarily use the hair typing system to describe their hair texture. Although this system was created by Andre Walker (1998) to help women identify their hair texture in order to better care for it, it appears that the hair typing system actually furthers the divide between Black women with different hair textures. Black women build online communities around their specific type of hair. They verbally reprimand Black women when they believe women have mis-typed their hair texture. Some Black women even admitted that when they type their hair texture, they are separating themselves from Black women with other textures.

While hair typing can help form a bond among Black women who do share the same hair texture, it also promotes a competition and divide among Black women with different hair types. However, hair typing is not necessary for Black women to know how to care for their hair. This raises the question of whether hair typing does more harm than good in the quest of Black women embracing their natural hair. Too often Black women, knowingly and unknowingly, foster the same stereotypes and colorism that others place upon them. In many respects, Walker’s Hair Typing System and other such typing systems, have unintended racist and stereotypical effects.

6.3 Conclusion

The study’s findings suggest the need for an intersectional approach for research on digital production and vlogging. While previous research with a feminist theoretical framework has shed light on the gendered experiences of vloggers and other digital content creators, I found that Black female natural hair vloggers have different experiences that are based on their race as

well as their intersecting racial and gendered identities. Research about beauty vloggers without a critical race or intersectionality approach does not consider the racial experiences of these vloggers either or how race affects attractiveness in the beauty vlogging industry (Berryman & Kavka, 2017; Hikmawati, 2019; Lee & Watkins, 2016).

My findings also suggest that Black female natural hair vloggers and hair care brands, both a subset of the beauty industry, value and define attractiveness in the beauty industry based on its proximity to Whiteness. The beauty industry uses of a hierarchy of race to understand and evaluate beauty. However, without acknowledging this hierarchy by using critical race theory or intersectionality theory, researchers are erasing a significant identity of vloggers. Also, their findings may not be accurate when applied to Black women and other racial minorities.

Although the natural hair vlogging industry is seen as a safe space where Black women are able to resist and protest Western beauty standards (Sobande, 2017), discriminatory practices reveal that even industries and workplaces that exist of primarily Black women still follow practices and guidelines that uphold hierarchies of race and perpetuate racism and colorism. The findings of this study show the significant impact that racism and colorism have on both the vlogging and beauty industries. Exploring exploitation in the vlogging industry without an intersectional approach erases and undermines the experiences and contributions of Black women. This study shows how racism and colorism have influenced what it means to be attractive in the beauty industry.

6.3.1 Limitations

Although there is a methodological limitation to this study, it does not invalidate the research or its findings. This study was limited in the geographical locations of study

participants. Due to limited resources to travel, I only physically interviewed participants in the geographical locations that I had access to travel. However, one group focused on interviews being conducted virtually, which allowed me to expand to a limited additional number of geographical locations. This study was also limited in time. Ten in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted. However, ideally more vloggers would have been interviewed to represent a larger representation of geographical locations.

6.3.2 Recommendations for future research

This study specifically focused on Black female natural hair vloggers in the United States. When examining how vloggers describe themselves and other Black women, America's historical context of racism and colorism were applied. Perspectives on racism and colorism differ by the country where the ideology is applied (Wodak & Reisigl, 1999). My suggestion for further research is to explore the different forms of discrimination and bias that Black female natural hair vloggers experience across various countries. It is important to learn the extent of the discrimination Black women experience throughout the diaspora and the impact that it has on their career. Widening the study's focus will also assess if the division between Black women with different hair textures also exists worldwide.

6.3.3 Recommendations for natural hair vloggers

The findings from this study also have practical implications for Black female natural hair vloggers. Black women in the natural hair industry indicate one reason that they are able to be taken advantage of is because they are not familiar with certain aspects of the vlogging industry. Many vloggers indicated that while they do have other Black female friends who are in the natural vlogging industry, they do not discuss information such as pay rates. They find it to

be a sensitive topic. However, many expressed the desire for these types of conversations and believe it would to be helpful in their success.

One recommendation that could help vloggers work through many of the concerns discussed in this study is to develop a national network of Black female natural hair vloggers. In this network, Black women can discuss pay rates, mobilize to advocate for pay equality, offer suggestions about negotiating, and warn each other about hair care brands companies who have discriminatory practices and have shown bias. The network could provide opportunities for vloggers to learn from the experiences of each other. Not only would this network give Black female natural hair vloggers knowledge on how to navigate the industry, it would also provide a form of emotional support to Black women who are experiencing discrimination.

In addition to a national network of Black female natural hair vloggers providing support and knowledge about the industry, it also could provide a much needed safe space for vloggers to examine discrimination they have experienced, how they responded to it, and how it has impacted them. This safe space can help increase their awareness of how they may have normalized and minimized racism and discrimination and, in many respects, internalized it. This network may also assist in bridging the gap between Black women who have different hair textures. The network would provide them with more exposure to vloggers with various hair types that would increase their knowledge about hair types and could lead to an awareness of biases they embrace about “good” hair and “bad hair. Such exposure and awareness could lead to more genuine appreciation, respect, and pride for natural hair and the women who wear it.

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