

BACKCOMBING

through



ZINE BY:
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Tying Up Confusion...

what is black hair bias?

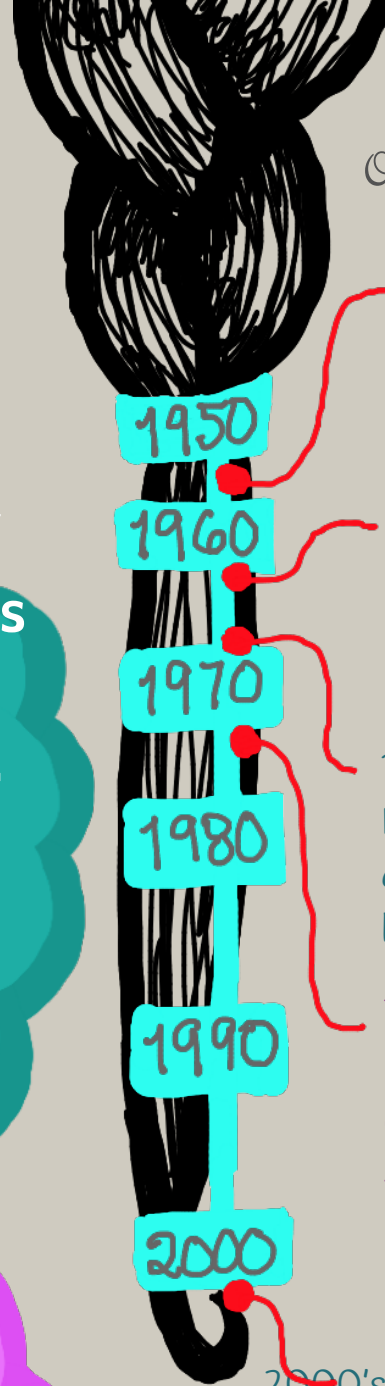


Perceptions of what is an appropriate/ attractive hairstyle for women of color is biased in favoring smooth, Eurocentric hair textures reiterated through media, the film industry, and the workforce, which in turn manipulates how individuals consider women of color.

Popular movies create the idea that black hair is only beautiful when it has been altered by continuously pairing natural ethnic hair with negative roles and casting women of color with relaxed or straightened, sleek styles for positive/important roles.

(page source: Dawson et. al., 2019)

STRAIGHTENING out the **TIME** line



1950

1954: Brown v. Board of Education abolishes segregation, but controlling images like "mammies" and "jezebels" manipulated society's perspective of black women.

1960

1960's: Black Power Movement empowered natural styles and voluminous Afros as a political statement, opening gates for various hairstyles, such as cornrows and braids.

1970

1968: "Say It Loud- I'm Black and I'm Proud" by James Brown was released, making way for more songs empowering people of color, as well as artists and show hosts wearing these styles to show their involvement.

1980

1970's: Due to the effects of the Black Power Movement slowly reversing the Eurocentric power dynamic and controlling images perpetrated by our systems, employers began to adapt stricter policies on hairstyles in the workplace, ensuring white people's power.

1990

2000

2000's-TODAY: Millennials were born during the black hair acceptance wave and now that they are of age to participate in society and the workforce, there is a growing increase in the media and film industry representing black hairstyles and natural styles, as well as in society. Younger generations are following suit of Millennials in terms of breaking down the stereotypes against women of color.

(page source: Orey, 2019)

WHY is black hair bias a PROBLEM?

Black hair bias creates unnecessary obstacles, both **mentally** and **physically**, for women of color. Most importantly, the outcome of constructed negative perspectives about women of color is the creation of **binaries**.



Balayages, not BINARIES

MY DEFINITION: a lack of representation within a marginalized group creates two distinct and opposite controlling images in media and society.

The most commonly used binary...

Good/Bad Hair:

This binary conveys that to have 'good' hair, it must be long, smooth, and straight, whereas curly, voluminous, and short hair is seen as 'bad'. Black women were continuously encouraged to lighten and straighten their hair by advertisements, beauty products, society, and most importantly their JOBS. Having a single, Eurocentric standard of beauty forces women of color to spend hours and a fortune chemically altering their hair, to keep their jobs and be accepted by society

"By the mid-1920's... straight hair had become the preferred texture to signal middle-class status" (Thompson, 2009)



It's not uncommon for a black woman with natural hair to be seen as "unkept and unemployable" (Ellis-Hervey, 2016) and businesses to take specific actions to prohibit wearing natural hair in the workplace. Being forced to comply with the 'good' hair standard, black women have to choose between permanently damaging their hair (sometimes to the point of falling off) with relaxers, spending hours in the morning styling it to a "reasonable" size, or paying up to \$300 for protective styles such as braids and twists. Without these luxurious investments, a woman risks losing her job, which leads to being unable to afford rent to feed her family. Black hair bias has a chain of events that impacts a woman's environment.

Mental impacts

The act alone of a woman having to triple the amount of effort as her white coworker to get ready for their job negatively impacts her self-esteem. It relays the idea that a black woman will only be good enough if she looks as Eurocentric as possible. Decreased self-esteem lowers motivation and self-worth, affecting a woman's desire to achieve her goals and take opportunities. This means less women of color owning businesses, becoming entrepreneurs, and disrupting stereotypes and binaries.



THEN

VS.

NOW

Society is more accepting than it has ever been towards natural styles because social media offers a platform to break free from controlling images. We see beautiful, dark women posing in magazines with their hair as big as it can possibly be; something that was undreamed of just a couple years back. On Instagram, beauty influencers embrace their curls and shoutout product recommendations for other curly-headed cuties. Cities are finally offering salons that specialize in ethnic hair and can accurately cut it, unlike most normal salons. Although, a change we have yet to see is 'normal' salons offering services for black hair textures, even if it's just a simple, high-quality haircut. Younger generations, the ones that are using social media the most, use it to defy not just black hair bias but countless biases towards identities related to class, gender, and race because content embracing unique characteristics spreads quickly everywhere!

AFRICANA WOMANISM

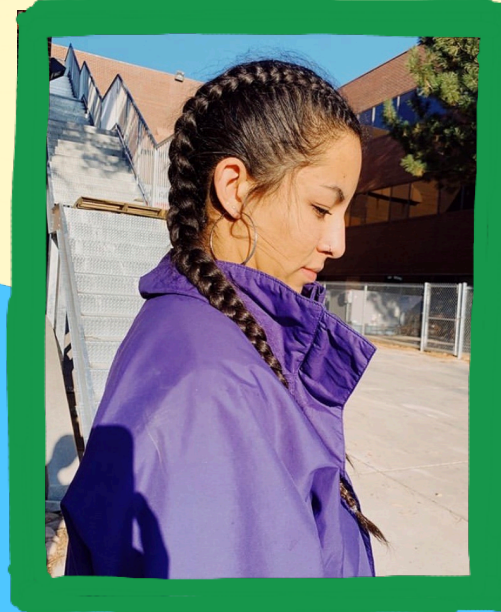
Africana Womanism challenges black hair bias with a contemporary solution to target historical trauma, it "...frames the needs of Black women through our unique relationship to hair to address mental and spiritual health" (Mbilishaka, 2018). It strives to enhance hair care spaces into community-based support systems, further inter-sectioning haircare into healthcare, and illuminate the historical role of hair in order to heal.

EMPOWERMENT

How can you help?

MY MISSION

This may seem simple, but **COMPLIMENT** your friends, classmates, or even strangers when you see them wearing their natural curls. Start **CONVERSATIONS** with women of color about their hair! Ask them about their styling process and appreciate how much effort goes into taking care of it. By asking questions to become educated and then educating others about what you learn, you can become an ally in fighting black hair bias in our community. Get to know which salons in your area are excelling in styling black hair so you can give your friends recommendations too!



I am pursuing an Ethnic Studies degree to educate people about marginalized groups, diversity appreciation, and in general creating awareness of different perspectives. My hair styling passion will give me the perfect platform to start important conversations.



As soon as I started hair styling school, I discovered that my black friends had to drive to Aurora to get their braids done. It aggravated me that they had to go through so much trouble, especially with the amount of salons nearby. My teacher mostly showed us how to style Eurocentric hair, as most beauty schools do, so I started binge watching videos on cornrows, braids, and twists. At first, I wasn't great but my friends appreciated my efforts to accommodate them so we worked together, trying different products and discussing techniques; with some patience and practice, my friends didn't have to drive an hour for their hair appointment!

: References :

listed in the order they appear in
the text

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- 4.) Ellis-Hervey, Nina. "African American Personal Presentation: Psychology of Hair and Self-Perception." *Journal of Black Studies*, vol. 47, 8, June 2016, p. 869-882.
- 5.) Mbilishaka, Afiya. "PsychoHairapy: Using Hair as an Entry Point into Black Women's Spiritual and Mental Health." *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism*, vol. 16, 2, 2018.