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Course: Soc 203s

Assignment #1: Peer-Reviewed Article Analysis

Basic Article Details

Title of article: Natural Hair: a Vital Component to Black Women's Health

Author(s): Tara B. Blackshear and Kelsey Kilmon

Journal title: Journal of Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities

Volume number: 8

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Basic Study Details

Research question or purpose

- **Exact:** “This study examines the impact of natural hair on physical activity behaviors and health profiles among Black women” (pp. 1573).
- **Paraphrased:** The purpose of this research article is to gain a better understanding of how natural hair and the stigmas surrounding it, create barriers for Black women in Western society. It aims to document and analyze the effects of assimilation, discrimination, and systematic bias Black women face due to their natural hair, in order to expose the effects of oppression on their mental and physical wellbeing.

Data: The 69 participants in this study were well-educated Black women with an average age of 26.75 years. Due to snowball sampling, 67 participants attend(ed) Towson University, a predominantly white institution. 17% of the participants had a master's degree, 16% had a bachelor's degree, 6% had doctoral degrees, and more than half (63%) of the participants were undergraduate students. These participants were located in Baltimore and its surrounding areas.

Method: The methods this study used to collect data on the impacts of hair discrimination and bias, were surveying, as well as physical measuring of the participants. The participants of the study were asked to answer questionnaires that reported their racial identity, hair type, and personal experiences that related to their natural hair. The study used inductive coding to organize the qualitative data gained from the demographics questionnaire. It also used Godnin's Leisure Time Exercise questionnaire to assess the participants' levels of physical activities over a

period of time. Lastly, the questionnaires asked participants to measure their levels of self-esteem, using self-esteem and hair-esteem scales. The study also obtained data about the participant's body composition, by measuring their body mass index and waist circumference, using a SECA scale.

Findings: The findings from the article support the theory that Black women face barriers, due to hair discrimination and bias, which can negatively impact their mental and physical health.

Data from the questionnaire show that the majority of the participants (60.9%) changed their hair for their job or a job interview. The authors reveal that Black women choose hairstyles, especially in environments where they are the most disadvantaged, that fit into White beauty/social standards. According to the data, 15 of the participants faced some level of discrimination due to their natural hair. The racial discrimination and oppression Black women face due to their natural hairstyles reinforces the negative messaging and stigmas about Black natural hair. The study concludes that these discriminatory ideals and racist experiences are internalized by Black women, lowering their self and hair esteem, and negatively impacting their mental health and physical health.

When the participants were asked what hairstyle they switched to, 17 respondents said they straightened their hair, 10 said they wore it up and away, and 6 wore wigs and weave. Data also showed that 78.5% of the participants had a chemical relaxer done to their hair at least once. According to the data, Black women with straightened hair are less likely to participate in physical activities due to maintenance concerns. This confirms that Black women face physical activity barriers due to straightened/unnatural hairstyles. The article states that celebrating and accepting culturally reaffirming hairstyles can lead to improvements in the physical and mental health of Black women.

Relevance

This study sheds light on a rarely discussed topic, the barriers Black women face due to their natural hair. Colonialism and white supremacy perpetuate unjust power dynamics and in-group favoritism, advantaging white people by disadvantaging marginalized groups. Black women face even more oppression due to their intersecting identities. Not only are they being discriminated against for being black, but they also face disadvantages for being a woman. Hair discrimination prevails, especially against Black women, because of the domination of white beauty standards and discriminatory policies throughout society.

This study revealed that hair discrimination has disproportionately impacted Black women by reinforcing the stigma against natural hair, even within the black community itself. These stigmas provoke negative stereotypes and language about hair texture and culturally appropriate hairstyles. This mutates into internalized racial inferiority, which further instigates the disempowerment of members of the Black community.

Studies that relate to this topic reaffirm the argument that the oppression of natural hair forces Black women to conform to society's interpretation of what is appropriate in order to protect themselves from discrimination and racial prejudice. By exposing the racial inequality Black

women face in our society due to their natural hair, studies like *Natural Hair*; force policymakers to acknowledge, not only the racial discrimination faced by Black women but their role in keeping the systematic racism going. Studies like these bring attention to the importance of cultural competence and acceptance by illustrating the direct negative impacts of a lack thereof. The oppression faced by Black women described in studies like this one, stresses the importance of having antiracist laws and policies, like the CROWN Act, to protect Black women's natural hair.