

# The Impact of Media Influence about Hair Texture on the Self-Efficacy of African American and Black Women

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**Abstract — The media is a powerful force. Eurocentric beauty schemas displayed repetitively in the media can negatively impact African American and Black Women to a level in which hair texture is used as a means to interfere with overall health, happiness, and even success thoughts about self and others. Psychosocial environmental problems such as reduced self-efficacy and career achievement on the basis of hair texture play an additional role. This study consisted of 322 African American and Black female participants 18 years of age and older. All participants completed surveys that measured social cultural attitudes toward appearances and general self-efficacy. Chi-square correlations revealed significant relationships between these two set of variables among these African American and Black women.**

**Keywords – hair texture, media influence, self-efficacy, African American women**

## I. INTRODUCTION

More than a century after Emancipation, colorism, as it relates to skin color and specifically in this study, hair texture, continues to aggressively impact Black American life. Affecting everything from life expectancy and mate selection [13] to prison sentencing [12] and identity [3; 21], colorism translates into real socio-economic differences (Hill, 1999) among both dark and light skinned Blacks [10]. However, due to a continuum of preference not all Blacks are disadvantaged equally [9]. Most studies of race may marginally address the influence of skin color, but completely ignore the influence of hair texture variation on Black identity and racial experiences [22]. It is important to understand that hair texture discrimination does take place, is a real experience of Black people, and varies depending on one's position along both the skin color and hair texture continuum.

This research is essential because little if any research has been based on the impact of the media

portrayals of Caucasian American women on African American (AA) and Black women as it relates to hair messages, hair beauty, and its influence; and yet there is evidence to suggest that those who navigate the world who are classified as “beautiful” enjoy copious amounts of privilege. Those privileges range from academic success, job success, and in general more access that allows one entry to more and better resources to meet a desired end and ultimately achieve and succeed in unlimited areas of life. Hair is a dominant beauty aesthetic that is often devalued on the heads of AA women in its natural state. “Our culture teaches us that beauty matters more for women than almost anything else. The pursuit of beauty is a capital investment for women and the pursuit of white beauty, the only beauty there is in the United States, is doubly so for women of color” [14].

## II. MEDIA INFLUENCE ABOUT HAIR TEXTURE

The media is a profound source of cultural teaching with an unmatched power to reach millions quickly and conveniently [23]. It is a “dominant force of socialization” that influences the social, emotional, and conscious being of its viewers [15]. The power of the media to transmit popular ideology goes beyond the ability to inform and entertain. The media is a transmitter that has been used as a tool of oppression [23]. The various popular media mediums of today (Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, et cetera) house a bombardment of images selling, teaching, and pushing out advertisements about how one should look, feel, dress, live, and think. The consumer culture in which we live makes it difficult to truly locate the origins of our own values and assumptions. Our values and assumptions appear to be a part of our natural world but are inevitably shaped by the subtle messages we consume [23].

The media tells women what they should look like and who they should aspire to be, while at the same time often representing women in a stereotypical, biased, and discriminatory way. These messages directed at women are magnified for AA women due

to the absence of images that actually look like them and reflect their cultural heritage [23]. The lack of visibility of AA women and the stereotypical manner in which they are represented greatly limit one's conception of themselves and ideas about what it means to be beautiful and accepted [23]. African American women who rarely experience the full range of images that truly represent them in diversity of skin tones, hair textures, shape, and size will begin to think that who they are is not acceptable and definitely not what's "in" [23]. When in fact AAs are represented, content analyses reveal that the majority of media depictions of AAs women (in Black-oriented media and mass media) are those with light skin, straight hair, and small noses and lips [5].

America's traditional and accepted standard of physical beauty is Eurocentric. The standards of beauty are created by and based on White women and their idealized features: straight blonde hair, fair skin, and thin bodies [6; 7]. "These mythical ideals, though most often unattainable and unrealistic, are assumed to be the most definitive model of what we should look like and admire" [23]. These normative beauty constructs set forth by the majority have been detrimental to the minority, especially AA women [23]. When AA women are constantly exposed to images that highlight the dominant culture's ideas of beauty attributes, they will conclude not only that being "beautiful" is a female's proper role in society [23], but that one must aim to attain the dominant culture's definition of beauty to be accepted in that society and achieve success within it.

### III. GENERAL SELF-EFFICACY

Self-efficacy, also referred to as personal efficacy, is defined as confidence in one's own ability to achieve intended results [19]. Psychologist Albert Bandura defined self-efficacy as one's belief in their ability to succeed in specific situations or accomplish a task [16]. Psychologists have studied self-efficacy from many perspectives and paths of development or lack thereof. These aspects involve the contribution and interaction of self-efficacy to self-esteem, self-concept, and behavior. Self-efficacy affects every area of human endeavor and has the capacity to play a major role in how a person approaches goals, tasks, challenges, and life [16]. At the center of self-efficacy is Bandura's social cognitive theory, which emphasizes the role of observational learning, social experiences, and MI in the development of knowledge and personality. One of the main concepts of social cognitive theory is that an individual's actions, feelings, and responses are influenced by what that individual has observed in others. Self-efficacy is developed from external experiences and one's own self-perception. These self-perceptions are influenced, even persuaded, by personal and external social factors [1; 2; 17; 18].

The propagated influences of media messages as well as social experiences over long decades which have discriminated against darker skin and hair classified as "bad" or "unkempt" have caused Black

women to internalize the influential concept of good and bad hair amongst themselves and believe the messages broadcasted that darker-skinned Blacks with kinkier hair textures are less attractive, less intelligent, and worth less than their lighter hued counterparts [4]. Oscar-winning actress Lupita Nyong'o recently addressed this issue, when her hair was altered on images of the November 2017 Grazia magazine, and commented in response:

As I have made clear so often in the past with every fiber of my being, I embrace my natural heritage and despite having grown up thinking light skin and straight, silky hair were the standards of beauty, I now know that my dark skin and kinky, coily hair are beautiful too.... [T]here is still a very long way to go to combat the unconscious prejudice against black women's complexion, hair style and texture. #dtmh (don't touch my hair) [8].

This unconscious prejudice Nyong'o speaks of fills and permeates into every avenue of the AA and Black woman's life as she tries to navigate a world that refuses to accept her as an equal and level the playing field of the beauty realm. There are various instances in which AA and Black women must fight to simply wear the hair that grows out of their heads. Examples in the news include: Tiana Parker, a 7-year-old, straight A student who was sent home for wearing dreads which her school deemed a "faddish style"; Nyadak Duckie Thot, a Sudanese model who was bullied for her "night-shaded skin-tone" and natural hair texture; the Army insensitively banning "matted and unkempt" hairstyles regarding AA women's hair styles before those guidelines were repealed; and Kimmika Williams-Witherspoon, a non-tenured professor, who observed how her AA counterparts refrained from wearing their natural hair until they gained tenure. Each of these cases, though separate in cultural and environmental factors, collectively contributes to the argument that AA hair has been negatively stigmatized within society. The message sent to AA and Black women as it relates to their outward appearance and overall beauty aesthetics is a lack of acceptance that ultimately impeded their ability to flourish. AA women are bombarded daily with cultural negligence and insensitivity regarding their hair which results in a lack of visibility and a deteriorated sense of self, and what it means to be beautiful and accepted [23]. There is no true reinforcement in the media, in society, or in certain environments for AA women standards of beauty, which is evident by how AA women who decide to delight in their natural assets are disapproved of, or feel the need to mask it behind chemical hair treatments or synthetic hair that is more socially acceptable.

IV. METHOD

A. Participants

The sample for this study consisted of adult females, 18 years and older, who were raised in the United States of America, and identified as AA or Black. The total sample population consisted of 322 participants. More than half of the sample, 52%, identified ethnically as AA ( $N = 168$ ), 37.5% identified as Black ( $N = 121$ ), 6.2% identified as Biracial ( $N = 20$ ), and 4.3% identified as being Multiracial ( $N = 14$ ). The participants were recruited, after obtaining IRB approval, through QuestionPro, a small university in Southwest Michigan, and Facebook.

B. Instrumentation

A demographic and hair questionnaire consisting of various questions related to age, education level, income, marital status, employment status, country of birth, where they were raised in the United States, ethnicity, parental ethnicity, and various questions pertaining to conformity, skin tone, and hair texture was administered.

A modified version of the Sociocultural Attitudes Toward Appearances Scale (SATAQ-3) composed of 30 items was used to measure one's endorsement of societal appearance ideas [20] was administered.

The General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE), created by Ralf Schwarzer and Matthias Jerusalem, a one-dimensional scale composed of 10 items that assess a general sense of perceived self-efficacy with the aim in mind to predict coping with daily life and adaptation after experiencing all kinds of stressful life events.

C. Procedure

The sample consisted of 322 participants. Participants were recruited via QuestionPro, a small liberal arts university's student population, and social media, specifically Facebook. A total of 200 participants were recruited from QuestionPro and 122 from Facebook and a small liberal arts university's student population in Southwest Michigan via email and sharing the research survey link.

Upon opening the survey, participants were introduced to the study and informed of any potential risks and benefits. They were also informed of their right to discontinue the survey at any time. By clicking on a particular button, at the end of the informative section, participants acknowledged that they had read and understood the introductory information, were consenting to take the survey, and that they met the requirements, including being female, age 18 and over, growing up in the United States, and identified as AA or Black. Following this, demographic information was gathered including age, education level, income, marital status, employment status, country of birth, where they were raised in the United States, ethnicity, parental ethnicity, and various questions pertaining to conformity, skin tone, and hair texture. Participants then responded to the SATAQ-3 Modified and GSE.

V. RESULTS

To determine if there was a correlation between participants who have been highly influenced by media messages about hair texture and their level of self-efficacy, crosstabs were performed on the data. Table 2 shows the correlation among overall high media influence about hair texture and its negative impact to self-efficacy. These numbers indicate that higher levels of media influence about hair texture decrease AA and Black women's self-efficacy.

TABLE I. RESPONDENTS' DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Demographic	N	%
Age		
Frequency by groups		
18-24	81	25.2
25-34	108	33.5
35-44	62	19.3
45-54	32	9.9
55-64	24	7.5
65-74	12	3.7
75+	3	0.9
Ethnicity		
African American	168	52
Black	121	37.5
Biracial	20	6.2
Multiracial	14	4.3
Hair Texture (natural: unprocessed/unaltered)		
1	14	4.3
2	12	3.7
3a	17	5.3
3b	24	7.5
3c	78	24.2
4a	64	19.9
4b	75	23.3
4c	38	11.8

The Sociocultural Attitudes Toward Appearance Questionnaire-3 (SATAQ3) modified is a tool that measures multiple aspects of societal influence as it relates to appearance including two dimensions of internalization of appearance, pressure, and information. In this study the tool was specified to address sociocultural attitudes towards appearance as it relates to hair texture. Relative to the SATAQ3, a higher score on each subscale indicates a greater tendency of one to endorse societal appearance influence of ideas and beliefs. SATAQ3 scores are negatively correlated, where higher scores indicate lower measures of self-efficacy in participants. Table 2

shows that 61.4% of those that had high SATAQ3 scores had low general self-efficacy scores. Which means that there is a significant relationship between high SATAQ3 scores and low general self-efficacy scores ( $X^2=7.932$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p=0.005$ ). About 15.7% of the variance in General Self-Efficacy scores can be explained by the variance in the SATAQ3 score.

These statistics demonstrate in this sample, and explain, that the greater the influence of media messages about hair texture in the participant's life, the greater the likelihood of decreased personal self-efficacy.

TABLE II. CHI SQUARE OF SATAQ3 AND GENERAL SELF-EFFICACY

		General Self Efficacy			Total	X <sup>2</sup>	df	p	ETA
		Low Scores	High Scores						
SATAQ3	Low Scores	Count	75	89	164	7.932 <sup>a</sup>	1	0.005	0.157
		% within SATAQ3	45.7%	54.3%	100.0%				
	High Scores	Count	97	61	158				
		% within SATAQ3	61.4%	38.6%	100.0%				



Fig. 1. Hair Texture Image and Corresponding Hair Typing Number

## VI. DISCUSSION

The effects of media influence are widespread and far-reaching. There is no crevice the media cannot touch or influence, for better or for worse. Media influence in this current study was positively correlated with low levels of general self-efficacy among AA and Black women. This is an important finding given that AAs and Blacks are the minority in numbers and representation but a large majority of media users and consumers. The longer AA and Black women are subjected to living in a world where media fails to represent them as able to set beauty standards regardless of hair type or texture; or denies the presence of certain hair textures as opposed to ones that are seen as more favorable, AA women will be dealt an injustice as a community.

The Crown Act, a law that prohibits discrimination based on hair style and hair texture, will not be enough to undo years of doing what media has done so well for centuries. Nor will the current Natural Hair Movement which serves to embrace black beauty and black hair. These are definite starts but there is still much work to be done for those not strong enough to ward off persistent negative sociocultural media messages about black women and natural hair textures, that continue to have deep, long-lasting, and even transgenerational psychological impact.

Future studies are warranted to determine additional variables of correlation that may intercept or enhance the influence of social media presentation in regards to AA and Black women hair typing and textures. This is a multicultural issue that translates into all areas of life, including counseling and education, as greater multicultural competence is needed by helping professionals to understand individuals who may have resentful ideas about their hair texture or cultural identity due to their Afrocentric features. With more research provided about this topic in the field of psychology, there could be many AA and Black women of all ages and walks of life who are uplifted from patterns of self-hate and self-doubt as a means to dissociate from a natural God-given characteristic that society does not accept or promote as beautiful, acceptable, or having the capacity to be as successful as their counterparts.

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