


Fall 2013

Fros, Weaves, and Kinks: The Social and Political Significance of Hair for Black and Coloured Women in Cape Town

Carol Antunez
SIT Study Abroad

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/isp_collection

 Part of the [Community-Based Research Commons](#), [Family, Life Course, and Society Commons](#), [Gender and Sexuality Commons](#), [Inequality and Stratification Commons](#), [Race and Ethnicity Commons](#), and the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Antunez, Carol, "Fros, Weaves, and Kinks: The Social and Political Significance of Hair for Black and Coloured Women in Cape Town" (2013). *Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection*. 1667.
https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/isp_collection/1667

This Unpublished Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the SIT Study Abroad at SIT Digital Collections. It has been accepted for inclusion in Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection by an authorized administrator of SIT Digital Collections. For more information, please contact digitalcollections@sit.edu.

Fros, Weaves, and Kinks: **The Social and Political Significance of Hair for Black and Coloured Women** **in Cape Town**



Carol Antunez

Advisor: Shifra Jacobson

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for South Africa: Multiculturalism and Human Rights

SIT Study Abroad, a program for World Learning

Fall 2013

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to begin by giving my most sincere thank you to my parents for their unconditional love and support throughout this experience. It is essential for me to say that without them none of this could have been possible. They have been there for me throughout this entire trip via Facebook, commenting on every single picture I have ever uploaded, via Skype, sending me their love, and financially, supporting all my adventures in South Africa. Thank you for believing in me and allowing me to make my own choices and decisions, always trusting that I will be fine and accomplish whatever I set my mind too. You remind me that I have the ability to do what I want and remind me to stop doubting myself. I cannot wait to be back at home and tell you about all my time here, and also give you the souvenirs I collected for you over the past three months and a half.

I would also like to say thank you to all my friends and my Hermandad back at home. You have all supported me and cheered me on from across the world. Every time I logged onto Facebook I had a smile on my face from all the messages, posts, and comments I received from all of you. Thank you for understanding that I needed to do this trip for my self and that even if I was unable to keep constant communication I always had you in my heart.

To Hamilton College, I want to say thank you for making this trip possible. I want to say thank you to the Opportunities Program, Financial Aid office, Study Abroad office, Career Center, and my advisor for making this trip become a reality.

I also want to thank my roommates for putting up with me for the past month. We have had some great times (Shout out to Westward Ho!). Cannot wait to experience happy hour with you guys in New York City. I also want to thank a very special person that has made my experience in Cape Town nothing more than amazing. You know who you are so I do not need to spell it out.

And lastly, I want to say thank you to the amazing SIT staff in Cape Town. Stewart, Tabisa, Maggie, and everyone else who was a part of our experience in South Africa, thank you so much. You were all great and you definitely kept this trip interesting. Thank you for making my first extended period abroad one that was truly enjoyable. Lastly, I want to thank my ISP advisor Shifra. Thank you for putting up with me whenever I freaked out about this project and reminding me that I was okay and on the right track. Thank you for all the time you put into this project and helping me through the various steps.

I Am Not My Hair
By India Arie

See I can kinda recall little ways back
Small tryin' to bawl always been black
And my hair I tried it all, I even went flat
Had a gumdee curly top and all the crap now

Just tryin' to be appreciated
Nappy headed brothers never had no latest
Then I hit the barber shop real quick
Had 'em gimme little twist and it drove them crazy

And then I couldn't get no job
This corporate wouldn't hire no dreadlocks
Then I thought about my dogs on the block
Kinda understand why they chose a stealin' rock

Was it the hair that got me this far?
All these girls, these cribs, these cars
I hate to say it but it seem so flaw
'Cause success didn't come 'til I cut it all off

Little girl with the press and curl
Age eight I got a Jheri curl
Thirteen and I got a relaxer
I was a source of so much laughter

And fifteen when it all broke off
Eighteen and I went all natural
February two thousand and two I
Went on and did what I had to do

Because it was time to change my life
To become the woman that I am inside
Ninety-seven dreadlocks all gone
I looked in the mirror for the first time and saw that, hey

Hey, I am not my hair, I am not this skin
I am not your expectations, no, no
I am not my hair, I am not this skin
I am a soul that lives within

Good hair means curls and waves
Bad hair means you look like a slave

At the turn of the century
It's time for us to redefine who we be

You be shaving it off like a South African beauty
Get in on lock like Bob Marley
You can rock it straight like Oprah Winfrey
If its not what's on your head, it's what's underneath and say, hey

Hey, I am not my hair, I am not this skin
I am not your expectation, no
I am not my hair, I am not this skin
I am a soul that lives within

Who cares if you don't like that
With nothin' to lose post it with a wave cap
When the cops wanna harass 'cause I got waves
Ain't seen nothin' like that, not in my days

Man, you gotta change all feelings
Steady judging one another by their appearance
Yes, India, I feel ya girl
Now go 'head talk the rest of the world

Does the way I wear my hair
Make me a better person?
Does the way I wear my hair
Make me a better friend?

Does the way I wear my hair
Determine my integrity?
I am expressing my creativity

Breast cancer and chemotherapy
Took away her crown and glory
She promised God if she was to survive
She would enjoy everyday of her life

On national television
Her diamond eyes are sparkling
Bald headed like a full moon shining
Singing out to the whole wide world like, hey

Hey, I am not my hair, I am not this skin
I am not your expectations, no
I am not my hair, I am not this skin
I am a soul that lives within

I am not my hair, I am not this skin
I am not your expectations, no, no
I am not my hair, I am not this skin
I am a soul that lives within

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-------------|
| I am Not My Hair | Page 3-5 |
| Abstract | Page 7 |
| Introduction | Page 8-10 |
| Literature Review | Page 11-17 |
| Methodology | Page 17- 21 |
| Glossary | Page 22 |
| Findings | Page 23 |
| Hair Practices and Hair Performance | Page 23- 26 |
| Hair as Social Capital | Page 26- 28 |
| Consciousness and Hair: Personal and Political | Page 28- 32 |
| Hair Politics at Work | Page 32- 34 |
| Conscious Awareness vs Normalized Behavior | Page 34- 38 |
| Ethical Reflexivity | Page 38- 39 |
| Conclusions | Page 39- 40 |
| Recommendations for Further Study | Page 41 |
| Bibliography/Reference List | Page 42 |
| Appendices | Page 43- 47 |
| Tomorrow's Daughters | Page 48 |

ABSTRACT

This project seeks to explore and understand hair performance by black and coloured females in Cape Town and understand 1) its possible political significance and 2) its social role. This ISP will attempt to explore the construction of hair as a symbol of class and beauty by looking at its historical significance. In this paper, I will investigate how young women in Cape Town, specifically black and coloured women, choose to represent themselves through hair and explore the connotations attached to their particular hairstyle choice. Furthermore, in this paper I will try to answer the following questions 1) Do black women feel societal pressures to straighten their hair, 2) If, so, why? And 3) Do their personal choice in regards to their hair, whether natural or straightened, reflect any political or social stance or movement?

INTRODUCTION

Perceived notions of beauty play a significant role in the construction of one's self image and have deep social implications. Body aesthetics and notions of beauty help shape the way individuals actively construct their identity. Beauty, as imagined and performed, largely defines how women view themselves and those around them. Hair representation is one of the most deeply significant forms of beauty performance especially for women.

I quickly realized the large role that hair performance played for black and coloured women in South Africa. From the moment I stepped out of the plane and landed in Cape Town, I was shocked to see what I initially thought to be an overwhelming number of perms and bad weaves. Coming from the United States, more specifically New York City, I was used to seeing women of color proudly sporting their natural hair. Natural hair in the United States has become a political statement and growing movement. It seems that young women of color all over the country are beginning to transition to natural hair, and moving away from chemically straightened and synthetic hair. Over the past five years, young women have decided to make social and political statements through their hair. Consequently, the natural hair industry has grown tremendously, further encouraging many women's choice to go natural. As I arrived in South Africa, a majority black country, I expected women to proudly wear their hair naturally. However, my first couple of weeks in Cape Town, showed me the opposite, it seemed like everywhere I turned I was looking at black women with a perm or synthetic hair. My curiosity for hair only grew as the weeks progressed. Two of the young women in my program, a black American and a mixed race American, wore their hair natural. It seemed that every time I was out on the street with them people would stop and stare at their curls, as if their hair was something extremely out of the ordinary. A rarity. As time progressed and I moved from

homestay to homestay, I could not help but notice the extent to which hair performance mattered. When I arrived in Tshabo in the Eastern Cape, I was shocked to see that my host Mama, an older woman about 60 years old, did not wear her hair naturally and instead choose to sport a weave.

As a result, I decided to investigate the significance of hair socially and politically for black and coloured women in South Africa. My ISP sought out to investigate current practices of hair performance, in regard to black and coloured women, as well as investigate how women feel and think about their relationship with their hair. When I began this project, I expected to find that the large majority of women I interviewed would 1) chemically straighten their hair or wear a form of synthetic hair, 2) that they would attribute these hair practices to racialized global standards of beauty. This ISP attempts to understand current hair practices for young black and coloured women in South Africa and tries to investigate deeper social, cultural, and political implications. This ISP consists of three different sections 1) the historical significance of hair and its performance, 2) the social implications of hair performance, why hair matters, and 3) the political implications of hair, personal and world politics. In order to achieve these objectives this ISP will pull from primary as well as secondary sources. To ensure that this ISP is faithful to the current practices and performances of hair in South Africa, this ISP will use interviews as its primary source. This ISP will focus on interviews with seven different women. Of the seven women interviewed five self identify as black while two self identify as coloured. These women will be the main source from which I will pull during my analysis and conclusions. However, this ISP will also heavily rely on existing literature on hair, race, and gender. For the purposes of this study I will pull from academic journals and books by Jenna-Lee Marco, Ingrid Banks, and Whitney Bellinger, among others. Although this study aims to provide its most accurate and sincere findings, it is necessary to acknowledge that this project faces various constraints and

limitations. This study relies on the honest answers of the women interviewed, and although it attempts to create a comfortable space for the participants, it cannot force women to share their true comments, experiences, and opinions, it can only hope participants are engaged in the project and sincerely participate. Moreover, it is also necessary to understand the time constraints under which this project was executed. As honest and analytical as this study attempts to be it recognizes that a four week period only allows for limited research in the selected topic.

LITERARY REVIEW

Before beginning this literature review, I must foremost state that vast literature in the South African context for my topic does not exist. Therefore, this literature review is limited in the amounts of pre-existing literature it was able to find that discussed and explored black South African women and their relation to hair. However, I found that much of the existing literature based in the United States could easily be applicable to South Africa. As a result, this literary review investigates and explores international academic research and literature associated to the social, political, and cultural relevance of hair specifically for black women. This literary review also explores the historical context in which hair has been placed in relation to its intersectionality with race, gender, and identity. Overall, this literary review aims to provide a theoretical and historical framework in which to place hair performance and all political, social, and cultural associations tied with hair.

In order to begin this literary review we must first understand that hair aesthetics play a significant role in the creation of the self and its presentation. From ancient times to today, hair has represented a symbol of social status and power. Moreover, as countries industrialized, developed, and democratized hair became tied to notions of self-esteem, sexual desire, and attraction (The Hair Foundation, 2009). As the Hair Foundation released in 2009, it has increasingly been recognized that “Facial and scalp hair, but especially scalp hair, contribute(s) to an overall body image, the image that one likes to see in the mirror and hopes to project to others” (The Hair Foundation, 2009). For this reason, it is easy to understand why hair has become an essential part of how beauty is performed, especially in the case of women. Conceptions and standards of beauty in relation to hair have been created following a white or western model. When the term beautiful hair or “good hair” appears, the general accepted image

that comes to mind is long, full, straight hair. However, this image is flawed since it is molded after white standards of beauty and only naturally attainable by the same demographic.

WHY AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN TRY TO OBTAIN 'GOOD HAIR'

To try to understand the long historical significance of hair and its impact on the black population it is necessary to first look at hair practices and its symbolism in a historical context. Whitney Bellinger author of "Why African American Women Try to Obtain 'Good Hair'," explains that during slavery slave masters and their mistresses would tell young slave children to refer to their hair as wool (Bellinger 2007 p.64). From a very young age, this act, served to further instill concepts of inferiority in the minds of slaves who would learn to associate their hair and their blackness with ugliness and their masters' hair and whiteness with beauty. In the case of house slaves, usually those slaves of a lighter complexion, hair was a source of pride. House slaves were "forced to look decent," in other words look as white as possible by straightening their hair, in order to avoid offending the white people in their presence (Bellinger 2007 p.64). While house slaves were made to look as white as possible, field slaves were given no time to work on their appearance. Field slaves, more specifically women, were forced to wear headscarves in order to hide their hair from their white slave owners whom found their hair or "wool" to be offensive (Bellinger 2007 p.64). Many times the females in the slave masters' household would force female slaves to keep their hair unkempt as a form of humiliation. Although, Bellinger (2007) writes through an American lens her writing is beneficial in helping to understand how the psyche of slaves, not only in the United States but globally, was affected and dominated by white slave owners.

As a result, the performance of beauty for black women is intertwined with a history of slavery, segregation, and human rights violations. From 1948 to 1994, South Africa was under the political control of the National Party, which instituted the segregationist policy of Apartheid. Apartheid was an era of human rights violations and crimes against humanity that served to demoralize the black and coloured population of Apartheid. During Apartheid, the government instituted policies that separated every aspect of life depending on race and even went as far as constructing racial classifications such as: white, coloured, India, and black.

In order to understand the functions and implications of current practices of beauty performance it is essential to look at the past. During slavery white slave masters judged the appearance of slaves. It is during this time that some practices and performance of beauty arose, specifically in relation to black women's hair. Many masters would allow slaves to have Sundays off in order to give slaves the time for "personal usage and proper grooming" (Bellinger 2007 p.65). It was on Sundays that the women would braid each other's hair in elaborate and intricate designs, which they would wear out on Sunday and keep concealed from their slave master's throughout the week. With the passage of time, "miscegenation produced women whose hair was considered 'good' as it was straighter and softer in nature and appearance" (Bellinger 2007 p.65). This is significant since progressively straighter and sleeker hair began to be the targeted ideal for black women.

HAIR REPRESENTATIONS AMONG BLACK SOUTH AFRICAN WOMEN: EXPLORING IDENTITY AND NOTIONS OF BEAUTY

In understanding why hair representation and performance is crucial as a black female in South Africa it is necessary to understand the structures that have been set that have defined beauty through a white lens. Jenna-Lee Marco's thesis "Hair Representations among Black

South African women: Exploring identity and notions of beauty,” attempts to explore hair representation in black women through semi-structured interviews which looked at the role of hair in three ways 1) hair and politics, 2) hair and media, and 3) circumstantial self-representation (Marco 2012). This piece by Marco serves as my most significant source since a great body of literature written in the context of South Africa regarding the role of hair in black women does not exist. Due to this lack of literature, my paper will heavily rely on Marco’s piece for guidance.

Constructions of beauty pressure women to conform or assimilate to the accepted standards of physical beauty. In her thesis, Marco presents a popular feminist theory that argues that physical appearance is more important for women than for men. Marco argues that this is due to “gender dualism,” which highlights that women are associated with the physical, bodily aspects, while men are associated with the psychological aspects, the mind (Marco 2012 p.4). This causes women to be the most sensitive to constructed standards of beauty. Physical attributes such as height, slimness, and straight and sleek hair are some of the physical manifestations of beauty that are accepted and promoted globally as the image that women should aim to achieve. Setting these standards of beauty serves to make women feel ostracized and diminishes self-confidence while promoting physical attributes that may not be physically attainable for all women. The importance of these physical attributes becomes essential since the presentation of the self as argued by Rosenborough and McMichael “serves as a visual marker, which is used by (...) women to find an identity and social stance to be affiliated with” (Marco 2012 p.11). However, it is essential to recognize that some of the attributes that women feel pressured to obtain, such as sleek and straight hair, are not easily attainable to all women since they carry racial undertones. As argued by Marco, “while white women also make concerted

efforts to ensure maintenance of the most superior form of a white image they can produce, the pressure of conforming to a particular beauty standard is heavier for Black women, as they require more "alterations" in order to reach the assumed ideal beauty image" (Marco 2012 p.4). The idea of "good hair" is constructed around the notion of whiteness. What is perceived as "good hair" is typically viewed as "hair that is closest to what looks like white people's hair," in other words hair that commonly fits the criteria of "long, straight, silky, manageable, healthy, and shiny" (Marco 2012 p.4). By definition, good hair becomes synonymous with whiteness while "bad hair" which is perceived as hair that is "short, matted, kinky, woolly, coarse, brittle, and nappy" becomes synonymous with blackness (Marco 2012 p.4).

In her thesis, Marco looks at the significance of hair performance for coloured and black women in South Africa. Marco approaches this topic by concentrating on history and theory. In her research, Marco begins by looking at the roots of hair performativity for black women. In the fifth chapter of her research "Hair Politics: Colonising the Mind," Marco finds that it is impossible to ignore the history of colonization, race, and power. As argued by Marco (2012), we must observe and analyze the greater "overarching themes of race, classification and agency" (p.35). As seen in Mercer (1987) as mentioned by Marco (2012) "Where race structures social relations of power, hair- as visible as skin colour, but also the most tangible sign of racial difference- takes on another forcefully symbolic dimension" (p.35). As a result, due to a long history of colonization and racism, physical markers of difference such as hair inevitably become politically and socially charged with deeper enrooted meaning.

Marco's thesis aims to "understand Black women's representations in South Africa as well as the social interactions evident in the relationship between a black woman and her hair" (Marco 2012 p.1). In order to understand the relationship of black women and their hair as well

as hair performance, and social and political implications, Marco conducts a series of interviews with eight different South Africa women. Marco interviews 6 coloured women and 2 black women. Like previously mentioned her interviews explore three major themes 1) hair and politics, 2) hair and media, and 3) circumstantial self-representation. Through Marco's exploration of historical context as well as observation of contemporary hair performance, and extensive interviews with the eight women she concluded that "hair, as projection of the self is constantly redefining itself and its meaning in a progressive social culture.... Furthermore, [she found that] women assume agency and a degree of importance and identity from the hairstyles they choose to wear on a daily basis" (Marco 2012 p.1).

GOOD HAIR

As explored by the movie "Good Hair," black women today go to extreme lengths in order to achieve what they perceive as "good hair," in other words long, silky, straight hair. Black women in the movie discuss how having good hair has become ingrained in their psyche from before they can remember, many times starting at the age of four or five. The movie approaches women of color in the United States and interviews them in an attempt to understand and deconstruct the reason that the weave industry and hair product industry has profited so ferociously from black women's desire to have "good hair," or in other words white hair. This yearning for good hair has led many women to invest hundreds and even thousands of dollars on weaves as well as submit themselves to harmful and dangerous chemical processes to change the texture of their natural hair to straight. The women in the movie explain this phenomenon by explaining that from a very young age, many times before turning five, black girls are taught that the texture of their hair is simply not good- making them not attractive and not marketable. As

comedian Paul Mooney said in the recording of *Good Hair*, “If your hair is relaxed, white people are relaxed. If your hair is nappy, then they’re not happy” (Good Hair, 2009). According to *Good Hair*, this line meant as a satirical political criticism is accurate in the sentiments of many black women in the United States whom feel pressured to chemically alter their hair or invest hundreds and sometimes thousands of dollars in foreign synthetic hair.

The movie also finds that hair plays a significant role in the job market, and in order to make themselves more marketable to employers, predominantly white owned, women chose to consciously straighten their hair. As a result, we understand that hair is inherently connected to social status, class, and economic well-being.

METHODOLOGY

This section explores and explains the methodological approach that was used during the duration of this ISP. For the purposes of this ISP, it was evident to me that the only way to truly gain an understanding and perspective on my topic would be to conduct qualitative research in the form of interviews. In designing my research framework, I decided to focus my data collection on substantive qualitative data. In my case qualitative data was the appropriate research design since it would allow me to truly explore meaningful qualities of human experience as well as “[acknowledge] the subjective view of participants in scientific research, while additionally allowing phenomena to be studied within its natural settings” (Marco 2012 p.39). As Marco, argues in her study

“the qualitative approach adopts an idiographic methodology- a science that is a representation of an individual’s event of discussion, or a limited reality- where comprehension is individualized... It also functions within a constructionist paradigm.”[Furthermore,] a social construction viewpoint emphasizes the social context of an individual, where feelings, thoughts, and experiences of an individual are located within the social realms of human functioning rather than

on an individual level. In addition, social constructionists maintain that individuals, along with their thoughts, feelings and experiences are also the product of social processes” (Marco 2012 p. 40).

Since this ISP focuses primarily on the individual’s feelings, thoughts, and performance, in the context of the greater social connotations it became evident that this would be the appropriate method for data collection and research.

When originally designing my methodology I decided to have a minimum of ten participants in order to allow for the greatest variation in data as well as truly gain an understanding of my topic. However, due to time limitations for conducting interviews as well as for the writing process of this ISP conducting ten interviews became unrealistic. As a result, I ended up conducting seven different interviews with coloured and black women in Cape Town. Nevertheless, I recognize that a greater amount of interviewees would give this research a broader framework in which to understand the general experience of black and coloured women in relation to their hair.

The purpose of my study was to observe the social and political implication of hair for black and coloured women in South Africa; in order to do this I set out to interview women in the greater Cape Town area. In designing this ISP, the original location of all ISP interviews was the University of Cape Town. My focus would be young black and coloured female students between the ages of 18-25. However, once again due to the fact that university students were in prime final examination time during the beginning of this ISP and many of the possible participants in this study has already gone home for the semester, it became impractical to focus this study on the University of Cape Town. As a result, when deciding where to situate and locate my interviews my first option was to focus on the city center area in Cape Town. As I began conducting interviews, my research led me to focus on much more than city Center in

Cape Town. Soon enough my interviews and research took me to Seapoint, Langa, Rondebosch, Bo Kaap, and downtown Cape Town. In order to illuminate a possible localized hair trend, I decided that a varied location would produce the best results. However, I do recognize that focusing solely on one particular area would have given me greater insight to a particular community in its relation to hair politics and performance.

When finding women for my interview I employed non-probability sampling. As argued by Tongco as found in Marco, “purposive sampling [involves] deliberately choosing each participant because of certain qualities this participant possesses (Marco 2012 p.40). For the purpose of this study, this method of sampling was appropriate since the demographic for this study was a very particular one. The participants in this study had to identify as female and either as black or coloured in the context of South African race understandings. As a result, this study excluded all males regardless of race as well as excluded Caucasian/European, and Asian women. Marco, whom conducted a similar study also focusing on the experience of black and coloured women in South Africa in the context of hair writes that for the purpose of this study

“females were chosen, because hair plays a more prominent role in their day-to-day lives and daily representations than men. Black women were chosen, because they can relate to, or at least understand the intimate and complex relationship between a Black women and her hair.... [Moreover,] Black women were chosen because of the importance placed on displaying ideal representations- not natural straight hair- in their intimate social environments that mirror Eurocentric notions of beauty” (Marco 2012 p.40-41).

Five black women and two coloured women were interviewed for this study. The ages of the women ranged from 18 to 32.

Participant 1 is 23 years old and considers herself “Black.” Interview location Green Point, Cape Town. She is a waitress in a café in Green Point.

Participant 2 is 32 years old and considers herself “coloured”. Interview location Bo Kaap, Cape Town.

Participant 3 is 18 years old and considers herself “Black”. Interview location City Center Cape Town. Participant stays in Langa, Cape Town. She is a student, taking a gap year.

Participant 4 is 25 years old and considers herself “Black.” Interview location City Center, Cape Town. She is a hairdresser.

Participant 5 is 18 years old and considers herself “Black.” Interview location Seapoint, Cape Town. She is a student.

Participant 6 is 38 years old and considers herself “Black.” Interview location Rondebosch, Cape Town. She works for the School for International Training (SIT) in Cape Town.

Participant 7 is 22 years old and considers herself “coloured”. Interview location Rondebosch, Cape Town. She works at a café in Rondebosch.

The interviews conducted were semi-structured. I began each interview with a set of eight to ten questions that were asked across the board to all participants. However, the interview questions were overwhelmingly open-ended questions that allowed free conversation as well as allowed the interviewees to share their experiences, thoughts, and feelings about their hair and its performance. For the purpose of this study, interviews were “the most effective way to obtain meaningful information from research participants, as it allows one to gather comprehensive information from a direct source” (Marco 2012 p.42; Parker 2005; Wimmer & Dominick 1994). Furthermore, as mentioned by Marco as argued in Parker (2005) “interviews provide the opportunity and spaces to question the contexts being studied and the relationships between the individual and his/her context(s)” (p. 42). Since this ISP explores race, identity, politics, beauty constructs and its performativity I deemed to have semi-structured interviews to be the most appropriate. The structure of the interviews allowed all participants to answer similar questions, providing different takes on a single subject while offering their own personal stories and experiences.

The interviews conducted ranged from an approximate ten minutes to about an hour depending on the investment of the interviewee in the subject. The interview began by asking the interviewees for their age as well as asking them to racially self-identify. The rest of the questions were open-ended questions that allowed for varied answers from all participants. Before beginning the interviews, oral permission to use the interviews and all material pertaining to the interview was granted by all participating interviewees. Following that a release form for the interviews was signed by all participant and myself on the day of the interviews. A second form was signed granting me to use the audio recording of all interviews as well as any pictures associated with the interview. In the case of Participant 2, only a oral permission was granted since due to scheduling conflicts a written form was not able to be signed. The structured questions of the interview were as following:

- Can you tell me how you feel about your hair?
- Can you tell me how you have chosen to style your hair over the past 2 or 3 years?
- Can you tell me why you have chosen to style your hair like this? What are your reasons?
- Can you tell me what you think is the most beautiful type of hair? Why?
- Can you tell me if there is any pressure on you to wear your hair a certain way?
- When you meet someone for the first time, how are you most likely to style your hair?
- How would you style your hair when going on a date?
- In a professional setting or job interview, how would you choose to style your hair?
- Taking into consideration that there are so many options when choosing to style your hair, do you make a conscious choice when it comes to what particular hair style you wear?

GLOSSARY

Apartheid: Period from 1948 to 1994 in South Africa, led by the National Party, which was defined by institutionalized racism and segregation. Period defined by its violence and violations of human rights.

Coloured: Racial classification constructed by Apartheid to classify women and men who did not classify as either black or white

Black: Racial classification constructed by Apartheid to classify women and men whom were considered to be Africa. For the purpose of this ISP this term will however refer to both “coloured” and “Black/African” women.

Relaxer: A formula that chemically alters the texture of hair. Usually done by Black women with coarse or “nappy” hair to gain a sleek and straight hair texture.

Natural: For the purposes of this ISP, a “natural” hairstyle will refer to hair that has not been chemically altered or straightened

FINDINGS

The objective of this ISP was to explore and understand current hair practices and performances by black and coloured women in Cape Town. This research project aimed to investigate the social and political influences and significance that hair performance may or may not have for black and coloured women. This project aimed to answer the following questions 1) What are the current hair practices of black and coloured women? 2) How is hair performed? How significant is hair for black and coloured women? 3) What are the social implications related to hair? and 4) Does a connection exist between politics and hair? In order to answer these questions this research project will focus on 7 interviews with black and coloured women in the greater Cape Town area. The women participating in the study were asked to provide their age as well as racially self-identity. The age range of the participating women range from 18-38 years old and all reside in the greater Cape Town area in places like Rondebosch, Seapoint, Green Point, Bo Kaap and City Center, Cape Town. Of the seven women interviewed, five self-identified as Black, while two self-identified as coloured. Due to the nature of this project, some selection was necessary when selecting participants for the study since the study requires that participants be 1) women 2) considered to be either black or coloured.

HAIR PRACTICES AND HAIR PERFORMANCE

The theme of hair practices and hair performance for black and coloured women was a consistent and dynamic topic during all seven of the interviews. The initial question presented to all the participating women was: How do you feel about your hair? Which about 90% of the time was met with a more than positive response from all participants. Only one of the seven participants met the initial question with any sort of negative comment, and even based on observation it seemed that the most of the women smiled upon hearing the first question. Soon

after, the second question of the study asked women to describe how they had chosen to style their hair over the past 2-3 years. This question brought out the most interesting conversation and talk on hair for most of the participants since each of the women interviewed had a different answer. Of the seven participants only Participant 5, admitted to keeping her hair in one consistent hairstyle. Since the age of 4, Participant 5, discussed that she has had dreadlocks and has chosen to continue with this hairstyle to today at the age of 18. When asked about her hair performance over the last couple of years she replied: "Yeah, I'd say I'm very happy with my hair. I've had dreadlocks since I was 4, 5. Umm, I think my parents just choose dreadlocks cause they figured it would be easier. But I love it, I never want to change it" (Participant 5, Personal Communication, 15 Nov. 2013). Like P5, P2 also likes to keep a more consistent hairstyle. When asked the second question, P2 laughed and then explained that since the age of 11 she had her hair cut short in a bob, Victoria Beckham style. She said she had chosen to style it this way since it was easier to maintain when she was younger as a competitive swimmer, but over a year ago, she had decided she was ready for a change. P2 self-identifies as coloured, and said that she chose to grow out her hair and have it in layers. This decision resulted solely on her own feelings towards her hair and her desire for a new look. P2 loves her hair and says that it was time for a change, and this hairstyle reflects a more mature look, reflecting of someone who is maturing yet is still "chic" (Participant 2, Personal Communication, 13 Nov. 2013)

Aside, from P5 and P2, all other participants admitted to constantly changing hairstyles and hair color. At the time of the interview, P1 had her hair straightened, not chemically, and admitted to changing her hair consistently: "I don't keep it natural at all times. I go to the salon and I renew it. And I put colors. I like to retouch. This one I'm having is brazillian hair, I like to put it, but not all the time. Only sometimes" (Participant 1, Personal Communication, 13 Nov.

2013). Like P1 who admitted to constantly changing hairstyles every week or so, P4 also said that she changes up her hair every two weeks. "I love my hair. It's my best thing on my body. I love my hair, I like doing my hair all the time, I do braids for like 2 weeks. I love my hair, 2 weeks and I change it" (Participant 4, Personal Communication, 14 Nov. 2013) The interview with P4 revealed that she loves to color, braid, straighten her hair consistently. Interviews with both P1 and P4 revealed that changing up one's hairstyle is a source of excitement and something to look forward to. Both women agreed that being able to do something different with their hair makes them happy, P1 asserted that as a woman one is always looking for the best next thing: "I do my hair, and then I'm thinking okay what am I going to do next!" (Participant 1, Personal Communication, 13 Nov. 2013). As I reviewed the rest of the interviews, I found that my interviews with P3, P6, and P7, also revealed similar trends. All the women in the interviews confessed that they love being able to change up their hairstyle as they please. When asked if she would change anything about her hair P6 responded: "No, I won't change anything about my hair. Because with the type of my hair I can do anything I want to do, all the hairstyles I prefer I can do on my hair" (Participant 6, Personal Communication, 18 Nov. 2013). Moreover, discussing hair performance with P3 she admitted that deciding on a hairstyle for her is based on her mood at the time: "depends on my mood, I look in the mirror and I'm like okay. When I feel more free I just let it loose, when it's hot like today I just have it in a bun or tie it up, to get it out of the way" (Participant 3, Personal Communication, 13 Nov. 2013).

Overall, after discussing hair performance with the women participating in the interviews I concluded that hair performance is a dynamic entity. Hair performance is different for all seven women participating in the study. However, a common theme among the interviews was a sense of pride towards hair and its performativity. Whether through applying different hair dyes, hair

extensions, braids, relaxers, or natural styles, all the women being interviewed can agree on the sense of joy and pride that their hair brings to them. Hair performance can be tied to women's sense of self, moreover, being able to change hairstyles seems to be connected to a peculiar sense of happiness. Like Marco (2012), this study also found that hair performance cannot be boxed and it needs to be recognized as a fluid and dynamic entity. This ISP found that if it had selected a group of seven different women its findings would probably experience change due to the dynamic nature of hair performance for black and coloured women in South Africa.

HAIR AS SOCIAL CAPITAL

Research prior to the interviews suggests that hair is a social symbol. As such, hair has been used as a form of social capital, giving people advantages in the workplace and in relationships. After interviewing and speaking with all seven women whom participated in the study, it became impossible to deny the social context in which hair is situated. Almost all interviews revealed multiple ways in which hair is used a form of social capital, giving each woman certain access. Many of the women revealed that hair is a large component of their presentation especially when meeting new people, especially potential partners. During the interview with P4, her current relationship seemed to be one of the primary factors that influenced her to change her hairstyling habits. P4 explains that over the last year she changed her hairstyle dramatically due to her relationship status.

"When I had the funky hair I was like I wanted to be stylish and a little bit crazy, I just wanted to be free, feel what you want. After then I changed to my real hair, not having dreads, not having colored hair, it's just a change of situation.... Just wanted to be more relaxed, just never wanted to be funky anymore. I didn't want to think about what society thought of you. In 2013, I was like let me change to the normal look in the society, so people respect you and not take you for granted" (Participant 4, Personal Communication, 14 Nov. 2013).

As we continued the interview, P4 talked about her love for hair and its performance. As a

hairstylist, she says that she has to change her look every two weeks at most. She also talks about how hair needs to be taken care of properly, “you see I wash my hair like 3 times a week” (P4). However, she admits that hair is a source of social pressure. However, in her case “I've never felt pressure in friends but I just want to do this style for my boyfriend. He doesn't like funky hair, he just wants me to look like a lady. Yes, some people, told me that you look nice when you got normal hair, not funky hair, you look so presentable, you look like a lady” (P4). Not surprisingly, P4 was not the only one of the women who spoke about the social implications of hair when it came to partners or potential partners. Many of the women tied part of their hair performance to men. The interviews revealed that male perception and male attraction play major roles in the way that women choose to perform hair. During my interview with P2, a 32 years old woman living in Bo Kaap, she discussed men and their perception of women in relation to hair. P2, has wavy hair and styles her hair by blowing it straight. As we talked about first impressions and first dates, P2 explained her choice of hairstyle and reasoning:

“Meeting someone for the first time "I'd probably go with straight hair. Yeah, it will always be straight.... Most men like girls with straight hair. Most men also like Barbie girls. Secretly, they love Barbie girls. They're just too shy to admit that they'll marry a girl with curls, but they still want to look at the Barbie doll everyday” (Participant 2, Personal Communication, 13 Nov. 2013).

My interview with P2 revealed the pressure most women feel to reach set standards of imagined beauty. Like P4 and P2, majority of the other women also discussed men during their interviews. My interview with P7 had a similar conclusion. When discussing first dates and first impressions, specifically in relation to men, she said “on a first date, the best first impression, you wouldn't first show the person this is me. I would go straight, and after a while I would be like okay, this is my hair” (Participant 7, Personal Communication, 25 Nov. 2013). Similarly, when talking about pressure to straighten one's hair P3 said: “And sometimes you actually feel

pressured to do it for guys, to look at us in a different way” (Participant 3, Personal Communication, 13 Nov. 2013). My interview with P7 and P3 exposed three things 1) the pressure women feel to impress men and its physical manifestations, in this case straightening one’s natural hair in order to make a good first impression, 2) the underlying racial tones that lie under accepted standards of beauty or traditional examples of beauty, in this case straight hair, an image constructed in the image of whiteness.

Moreover, my conversations with P1, P3, and P7 also revealed certain understandings on the opposite sex. When talking to P3 about men and their ideas of what beautiful hair, specifically long hair on women, she said "I think its more attractive, they love having something to pull on” (Participant 3, Personal Communication, 13 Nov. 2012). This sentiment seemed to be echoed in my interviews with P1 and P7, whom agreed that men seem to have a certain attraction to long and straight hair.

CONSCIOUSNESS AND HAIR: PERSONAL AND POLITICAL

Of all the seven women interviewed, all but one stated that they loved their hair the way it is. As previously discussed the first question in this study asked women to explain how they felt about their hair:

P1: “I love my natural hair. I'm very happy about that. I feel more comfortable when I have my own hair. I like my own hair. I go to the salon like 3 times a week to renew it and to wash it, and put conditions in my hair. I feel like my own hair is more important than any hair” (Participant 1, Personal Communication, 13 Nov. 2013).

P2: “Generally, yes... but I prefer it straighter than what it is” (Participant 2, Personal Communication, 13 Nov. 2013).

P3: “I’m really happy about it...” (Participant 3, Personal Communication, 13 Nov. 2013).

P4: "I love my hair. It's my best thing on my body. I love my hair, like doing my hair all the time; I do braids for like 2 weeks. I love my hair, 2 weeks I change it" (Participant 4, Personal Communication, 14 Nov. 2013).

P5: "Yeah, I'd say I've very happy with my hair. I've had dreadlocks since I was 4, 5. Umm, I think my parents just choose dreadlocks cause they figured it would be easier. But I love it, I never want to change it" (Participant 5, Personal Communication, 15 Nov. 2013).

P6: "I love my hair. I am so happy with my hair. My hair is natural and it's been natural since 2000. I choose to stay with my hair as natural as it is" (Participant 4, Personal Communication, 18 Nov. 2013).

P7: "Quite proud, I like my hair" (Participant 7, Personal Communication, 25 Nov. 2013)

The answers above clearly and overwhelmingly express the satisfaction and affection that the majority of the women interviewed have for their own hair. As I discussed hair with many of the women in the interviews, their passion and love for their hair, was one of the major themes of majority of the interviews. My interview with P3 was one of the most revealing. During her interview, P3 openly discussed her journey with hair, from years of relaxed and straight her to her newfound journey into natural hair. As we began our interview, P3 explained how she had ended up with natural hair, which at the time she had styles in long braids:

"When I was younger I first had dreadlocks... then when I went to school I realized that most of my friends had relaxed hair and straight hair, and then immediately after that I went back home and I told my mom I wanted to have it relaxed and straightened as well and then she was like okay "fine". She wasn't really fuzzy about it" (Participant 3, Personal Communication, 13 Nov. 2013).

After going to school for the first time, P3 discusses the pressure she felt from her friends and her peers to chemically straighten her hair. Although as a young girl she was never told to straighten her hair, she felt the pressured from the majority of girls. This is significant since it reveals the young age at which young black girls begin to see that their natural hair is not as

“good” as their natural hair.¹ What is also noticeable is her mother’s reaction. Her reaction exposes how normal straightening hair practices are for the Black community. In her interview P3 acknowledged why many young Black women chose to chemically straighten their hair and she discussed the pressure to follow such trend:

"Yeah, I have. Most people have their hair straight. The thing about kinky hair is that its just really tangled and it gives you problems most of the time, its not that easy to maintain. I kinda understand why everyone just wants to have straight relaxed hair because its easy to maintain. Just perm it and have it in a bun, as simple as that. But yeah, I have felt pressured because most people have their hair straight.... I think as an African girl, along the years we have been pressured to have like straight hair, and that having kinky hair is unacceptable for whatever reason, and yeah, and we've been pressured to have straight hair and not be comfortable in our skin and not be who we are because of umm you know the why people choose to look at us. But I feel like it shouldn't be that way. We need to be more comfortable and just be who we are. And not care what anyone else has to say about the way we look” (P3).

As we continued our interview, P3 discussed her transition into natural hair. She explains that after years of relaxing and damaging her hair she finally came to a realization.

"You know what I'm not actually my hair, I've never had my natural hair and an Afro ever. And I wanted to try that out. So, I cut my hair this year. I have just have my natural hair. I'm really happy with my hair, and I have really thick hair so it doesn't give me problems.... I think the main reason was that I realize I am actually black, and I need to be more proud of who I am and what I am. And I feel like having my natural hair in an Afro is like my crown. And yeah, and it's really made me proud to have an afro, I just want to have my natural hair” (P3).

As the interview with P3 continued, she talked about the influence of hair on herself but also on her baby sister and future generations. In her interview, P3 voiced her concern for little girls growing up now who are many times not taught to love their natural hair and as a result, at the age of 4 or 5 they perm their hair. During the interview P3 talked about the damage to one’s hair as well as one’s psyche:

“The thing about it is that along the years, I don't know where it came from but

¹ Explain why “GOOD” is used in quotations

we've just been relaxed and had our hair permed for the longest time. To the point when I realized it was just a bad way to do things. You have to relax your hair every month or 3 months, doesn't matter if you keep relaxing it because it goes back to its natural form. And its just too much pressure on your scalp and your hair, because the relaxer burns like shit, and its too much pressure on the kids as well. I have a baby sister at home and at some point she's going to want to relax her hair, and when she goes to the salon she's going to be uncomfortable because she's going to have to sit still...." (P3).

Like with P3, my interview with P6 discussed black consciousness and its manifestation through natural hair. My interview with P6, more profoundly touched upon the racial undertones that are promoted in the media and popular culture. During this interview the interviewee discussed basic ideals of black consciousness which promote black beauty. Unlike the majority of the interviews with the other women, this interview was able to plunge in depth and discuss race, identity, and beauty. I found that this could possibly be attributed to the age difference between the women being interviewed. While most of the women in the interviews were under the age of 23, P6 is 38 years old and is involved in the academic field.

"If we go back to black consciousness, politically, when you want to be you, you start from your hair. I'm a black conscious person, I love my being black. I cannot change my color to be white, but if I start to change my hair to Beyoncé or whoever, then that's the beginning of not being you. So I say yes" (Participant 6, Personal Communication, 25 Nov. 2013).

My interview with P6 made me reminiscent of my talk with P3. Participant 3, is a 19-year-old student however, her journey into natural hair and decision to go natural had similar qualities of that of P6. As the interview took off P6 explained her connection with her hair.

"From primary up to high school I never put chemicals in my hair. And then at University first year I had my natural hair, 2 and 3rd year I was going between straightening using chemicals, it use to burn my head and scalp.... Peer pressure of looking good and all that. Straightening hair was the cheapest way to keep your hair... and time as well. I didn't have time to spend time braiding my hair all day when I was a student. And it used to be expensive" (P6).

As mentioned by some of the other women participating in this ISP, P6 also referenced the

amount of time that natural hair requires to be well kept as well as discussed how much more expensive it is to maintain black hair in its natural shape, by braiding and styling, than it would be to perm one's hair. This mention of time commitment was also brought up by P3 and P1. In my interview with P1 stated that having her natural hair for more than two weeks would be difficult: "It's not easy to have your own hair, just your own hair, for all week or two days, that's just too much (Participant 1, Personal Communication, 13 Nov. 2013).

HAIR POLITICS AT WORK

This ISP revealed that hair cannot be thought of or experienced in a singular way; in fact, hair is a dynamic entity for all women and works in individual ways depending on the specific circumstance of each woman. However, there are certain experiences that are shared by black and coloured women when discussing hair. A common experience shared by the majority of the women interviewed revolved around the politics of hair in the workplace. This ISP found that in a professional setting or work environment women are more conscious and sensitive towards hair performance. When asked about how each participant would choose to style their hair for a job interview or professional setting the results were as following:

P1: "If I'm working I don't like natural hair... It's not easy to have your own hair, just your own hair... When my hair is straight sometimes I feel uncomfortable, but I like to close my hair, especially when I'm at work. Even when it's natural I can close my hair because its long"² (Participant 1, Personal Communication, 13 Nov. 2013).

P2: "I would have it up or in a French roll"³ (Participant 2, Personal Communication, 13 Nov. 2013).

P3: "I'd have it up on a neat bun" (Participant 3, Personal Communication, 13 Nov. 2013)

² "close" refers to being able to tie up one's hair

³ "French roll" refers to a well kept bun

P4: "I would use a relaxer or have it nice so I can look like a lady" (Participant 4, Personal Communication, 14 Nov. 2013).

P5: "I don't think I would style it differently, just neaten it up." After being asked if she thinks her dreadlocks would make an impact on her professional life or career in the future: I'm sure it will... but we will cross that bridge when we get there" (Participant 5, Personal Communication, 15 Nov. 2013).

P6: "Cornrows, simple and very neat. Or maybe braids. But if I have my natural hair I will just wash, blow-dry" (Participant 6, Personal Communication, 18 Nov. 2013).

P7: "Definitely straight. As a matter of fact when I came to an interview for this job i straighten my hair" (Participant 7, Personal Communication, 25 Nov. 2013).

To my surprise, the answers by each of the women were all very different. Going into this ISP, after examining existing literature on hair and the professional setting, I expected to find that women would overwhelmingly choose to straighten their hair. However, as seen from the above data the majority of the women did not by default choose to straighten their hair. In the case of P3, P5, and P6, all women with natural hairstyles, said that in the event of a job interview or in a professional setting they would simply choose to neaten or tighten up their already existing hairstyle or have it up. In the case of P1 and P2, they would also choose to have their hair up, however, it is essential to recognize that these two participants regularly choose to have their hair straight, changing their natural texture, in order to make it easier to have their hair pulled back or up. And lastly, in the case of P4, naturally coarse hair, and P7, naturally curly hair, they would both choose to have their hair straightened. As I mentioned before, when interviewing the women regarding hair performance at their place of work or other professional environments I expected to see hair straightening as the default hair style of choice for the majority of women participating in the study. Pulling from readings by Bellinger (2007) and Marco (2012), whom argue that straight hair is associated to whiteness and social capital, I found it interesting that more than a third of the women interviewed still choose to maintain their natural hair and simply

choose an up do for this environment. As seen in Marco (2012), articulated by by Rosenborough and McMichael hair is physical representation of beauty that “serves as a visual marker, which is used by (...) women to find an identity and social stance to be affiliated with” (p.11). In this case, I expected straight hair to serve as social capital. This ISP found that in fact straight hair is considered a form of social capital, and is acknowledged by the majority of the women being interviewed, however, some of the women interviewed in full of recognition of the capital advantage of straight hair, still choose to keep their hair natural. This ISP also found that this was the case with the women whom were aware of hair as a political tool. During the interviews with P3, P5, and P6 it became evident that even though there is an awareness that straight hair is tied to higher social capital, the decision to remain with natural hair takes precedence.

CONSCIOUS AWARENESS VS NORMALIZED BEHAIVOR

Before diving into the final section of my findings, it is necessary to begin by explaining the title for this section. During the duration of this ISP, I was surprised to find two major themes in the conducted interviews 1) the women interviewed were deeply aware of the racial undertones associated with hair practices and hair expectations 2) the women interviewed did not correlate peculiar hair practices, such as straightening and relaxing, with racialised understandings of hair performance. As a result, when discussing the findings of this study I was forced to mediate two very contrasting realities one of deep awareness and the other of unawareness or normalized acceptance of racialised practices.

The first interview conducted for this ISP was with P1, at her workplace, a café in Green Point, Cape Town. P1, identifies as Black, and at the time of the interview wore her hair straight and pulled back in a ponytail. My interview with P1 was the beginning of the emergence of the first pattern noticed. During this interview, I struggled to discuss the relationship between hair,

beauty, and race. During P1's interview I noticed that when asked about pressure to have her hair styled any particular way the answer was no, never felt any pressure at all. However, as we continued the interview little comments by P1 revealed otherwise: "If I'm meeting someone for the first time I have to go to the salon. I have to make it beautiful.... My natural hair is for me, for my boyfriend, for my house but not for a special person" (Participant 1, Personal Communication, 13 Nov. 2013). Comments like this one revealed to me the deeply engrained idea of natural hair as not good enough. During my interview with P1 I was reminded of Bellinger's paper "Why African Women Try to Obtain 'Good Hair'". As Bellinger argues the idea of natural hair as ugly or not good enough has been instilled in the minds of black women and women of color for hundreds of years. Bellinger argues that during slavery time, house slaves were forced to look decent, meaning forced to look as white as possible, by straightening their hair. We can argue that old practices such as this one have ingrained in the psyche of many black women that straight hair is beautiful hair, and natural hair is a source of shame. Although, my interview with P1 was a bit ambiguous in representing these ideals of beauty, small comments like the one above, revealed to me a passive acceptance of straight hair as the normative of beauty. However, my interview with P1 was not the only one that revealed this. I found similar patterns in my findings in the interviews conducted with P2, P4, and P7. Again, like in my interview with P2, the theme of the interview did not revolve around the underlying tones of beauty and hair performance. My interview with P2 proved interesting. As we discussed hair esthetics, she was the only participant whom said she was not completely happy with her hair and wished it would be straighter than her natural form is now. When I asked why, P2 simply replied that it appealed to her the most. During this interview, I tried asking further questions to decode why P2 wished to have straighter hair and why she related straighter hair to

more beautiful hair. However, the interviewee seemed closed off to answering these questions with anything more than because I like it that way. Moreover, like previously mentioned my interviews with P4 and P7, were also revealing in similar ways. In my interview with P4 she related the idea of looking like a lady through hair to mean having straight and relaxed hair: “I would use a relaxer . . . so I can look like a lady” (Participant 4, Personal Communication, November 14, 2013). In my final interview with P7, I found that although unnoticed to P7 she related a lot of the reasoning behind her straightening her hair to ideas of straight hair as social capital as well as race relations. In her interview when talking about hairstyle choice when making a first impression P7 stated:

"Would probably be straight. I would assume that it would look better straight than in my usual wavy. There's a kind of stereotype of how you should, I don't know how to put it, but do you understand what I'm trying to say... It looks more neat. It shows the person you took the time to straighten your hair" (Participant 7, Personal Communication, 25 Nov. 2013).

This interview revealed a level of awareness on the racial undertones related to hair performance. However, during the interview I noticed that this awareness was not one that was blatant instead it was something in the background, on the mind of the interviewee. During the interview, P7 rejected ever feeling any pressure to straighten her hair yet openly admitted to straightening her hair for her last job interview since she believed it would make a stronger impression since it would show her interviewer that she had taken the time to look “presentable and neat” (P7). This idea of looking presentable can be explained by Bellinger (2007). As I previously mentioned, old ideas of beauty and the concept of looking presentable, arise from the period of slavery. This series of interviews showed that although many of the women interviewed can relate to the image of straight silky hair as beautiful the majority of the women interviewed are not conscious of the roots of such thinking.

Yet, this ISP also found that some women are very consciously aware of how hair is socially interpreted and where such interpretations come from. In my interview with P3 and P6, I found very high levels of consciousness. During these interviews, I was able to discuss the intersectionality of hair, beauty, identity, and gender openly with the two women. In my discussions with both P3 and P6, the discussion touched upon and in some level focused on black consciousness and the role that plays in self-perception. Both women strongly felt that their hair was their crown and looked at it as a source of pride. I found that in both cases, the women both praised the Afro as the ultimate symbol of black beauty in terms of hair performance. The Afro as a source of pride and symbol of black beauty is not a new phenomenon. As discussed by Banks in *Hair Matters*, “natural hair has become a symbol of resistance that challenges mainstream notions of beauty” (Banks 2000 p.69). Moreover, black consciousness representatives such as Angela Davis, marked the Afro as a symbol of struggle and black power.

Looking at the data collected, and the range of people interviewed I was able to notice certain trends. When I initially began this project, I expected to find that most of the women interviewed would choose to straighten their hair. However, I had no idea what I would find as the reasoning for such hair practice. As I took on this research project, I also expected to find generational gaps in the way that hair performance was understood among black and coloured women in South Africa. Moreover, I also expected to find different interpretations and level of social awareness between women in the academic field and other women. As this ISP has come to its conclusion I have made the following observations 1) in fact, there seems to be a generational gap between women in how they view and interpret the social and political significance of hair, however this ISP cannot be used to prove this point exclusively since the

majority of the women interviewed were in their early 20s. And 2) the women interviewed whom were still in school and considered students as well as the women in the academic field seem to have a much stronger awareness of how hair is used in the social and political sphere.

ETHICAL REFLEXIVITY

When the time to carry out my research project came, I took into heavy consideration any ethical concerns and ethical dilemmas that could occur during the progression of my research. My main concern during the duration of my research was to be mindful of the power dynamics evident between myself, the research, and the subjects, the interviewees. In order to address this issue I made sure that the interviewees knew their rights while being interviewed which included but were not limited to having 1) the choice to not participate, 2) the right to choose not to answer certain questions, and 3) the right to have their privacy respected by using alias to represent each participant. Consequently, all participants signed forms that allowed me written consent to use all recorded data as well as a visual consent form, which allowed me photograph them if they allowed me to. After being granted both a verbal and written consent form, I began interviews as scheduled.

During the duration of this study, participants were not vulnerable or at risk since the interviews focused primarily on trying to understand each individual's specific relationship to hair and its performance. However, I acknowledge that for some women talking about hair, beauty, and its possible relationship to underlying racially oppressive structures may be difficult. To address such concerns, I began majority of my interviews by sharing my personal reasons for conducting this research. By sharing my own feelings and thoughts on my research topic, I hoped to eliminate the power dynamic between the interviewee and the interviewer.

Furthermore, as the interviewer I tried to eliminate all biased when speaking to the women

participating in the study. Since the study focused on the social and political significance of hair, I wanted to make sure that the women did not feel any biased coming from me. In order to ensure this, I never showed any preference for any particular hairstyles of hair textures. During the interviews, I simply recorded the answers the women gave to the questions posed to them and engaged in conversation that did not reveal any preconceived biases.

CONCLUSION

This ISP sought to gain an understanding of hair performance for black and coloured women in South Africa specifically in terms of its social and political significance. At the beginning of this research project, I set out with the task to interview women regarding their personal hair performance as well as their interpretation of the significance of hair. Moreover, this ISP sought to investigate what black and coloured women interpreted their hair to mean in the social and political sphere as well as in their individual domain. As originally stated this ISP consists of three different sections 1) the historical significance of hair and its performance, 2) the social implications of hair performance, and 3) the political implications of hair, in the greater political and personal spheres. In order to achieve these objectives this ISP will pulled from primary as well as secondary sources. As explained in the methodology section of this paper the majority of the data used are primary sources collected from the seven women participating in the study.

Through its analysis of existing literature on the subject and because of communication with the seven women, participating in the research project this ISP came to several conclusions. For one, my initial hypothesis was proven wrong. When I began this research project, I expected to find that the majority of women interviewed would have straight hair, either chemically or by

flat iron. However, as I began my initial interviews I quickly realized this would not be the case. I found that the majority of the women interviewed choose to keep their hair naturally for the most part but straightened it depending on the situation. For instance, this ISP found that in a professional setting or at work majority of the women choose to straighten their hair. Moreover, this ISP found two contrasting positions 1) women were aware of the underlying racial significance that hair straightening has for black and coloured women, 2) women were not actively conscious of the social and political implications of hair straightening. Additionally, this ISP also found that 1) a generational gap exists between women when discussing hair performance in terms of its relation to a larger global political sphere, and 2) women in academic were more aware of the significance of hair for black and coloured women.

Overall, this ISP tried to focus on the importance of hair for black and coloured women by trying to explore its broader social and political implications. However, this research due to its time constraints cannot offer a full analysis of the culture of hair performance for black and coloured women in Cape Town. In order to provide a full analysis of such this project would require a longer time frame for research as well as a larger number of participants.

After completing my research, I argue that hair performance for black and coloured women in Cape Town is a dynamic entity and varies depending on the social circumstance of each woman. Furthermore, I argue that understanding the history of black and coloured women in South Africa, and understanding the racial oppression that black women have undertaken for so long is beneficial in understanding current hair practices and performance.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

- For future or further study of this topic, I recommend a longer ISP period. In order to have truly satisfying results the research period should be longer, allowing for more primary source research such as interviews.
- I recommend interviewing men. During my research, I found that many women styled their hair in particular ways to maximize male attention and sexual attraction. Would be interested to see what men find attractive when it comes to hair and why? Are men also affected by social constructed ideas of beauty? Do they find white modules of beauty to be the most attractive?
- Look at the political significance of hair for men in Cape Town. For example, the significance of dreadlocks or certain hair styles for men? What are its political and cultural ties?

BIBLIOGRAPHY/REFERENCES

- Amusa, M. (2007). Hair Weaves Tangle Self-image for Black Women, Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=fyh&AN=MRB-SRI081006-044&site=ehost-live&scope=site>
- Banks, I. (2000). Hair Matters: Beauty, Power, and Black Women's Consciousness. New York U Press. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/60044693?accountid=11264>
- Bellinger, W. (2007). Why African American Women Try to Obtain 'Good Hair'. University of Pittsburgh at Bradford. Retrieved from <http://www.pasocsociety.org/bellinger.pdf>
- Madnani, N., & Khan, K. (2013). Hair cosmetics. *Indian Journal of Dermatology, Venereology & Leprology*, 79(5), 654-667
- Marco, Jenna-Lee. (2012). Hair representations among Black South African women: Exploring identity and notions of beauty. University of South Africa. Retrieved from http://uir.unisa.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10500/9204/dissertation_marco_jl.pdf?sequence=
- Participant 1, Personal Communication, 13 Nov, 2013.
- Participant 2, Personal Communication, 13 Nov. 2013.
- Participant 3, Personal Communication, 13 Nov. 2013.
- Participant 4, Personal Communication, 14 Nov. 2013.
- Participant 5, Personal Communication, 15 Nov. 2013.
- Participant 6, Personal Communication, 18 Nov. 2013.
- Participant 7, Personal Communication, 25 Nov. 2013.
- Saro-Wiwa, Z. (2012). Black women's transitions to natural hair. *New York Times*, Retrieved From <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=76267768&site=ehost-live&scope=site>
- Tate, S. (2007). Black beauty: Shade, hair and anti-racist aesthetics. *Ethnic & Racial Studies*, 30(2), 300-319. doi:10.1080/01419870601143992
- Ulmer, C. (2001). Beauty Matters, and: Hair Matters: Beauty Power, & Black Women's Consciousness, and: The Face of Our Past: Images of Black Women from Colonial America to the Present (review). *NWSA Journal*. Retrieved from <http://muse.jhu.edu>
- Stilson, Jeff. D. D. (2009) *Good Hair*. United States, HBO Films.

APPENDIX

A. Interview Questions

1. Can you tell me how you feel about your hair?
2. Can you tell me how you have chosen to style your hair over the past 2 or 3 years?
 - a. Can you tell me, have you ever straightened your hair? Any particular reasons?
 - b. Have you worn it naturally? Any particular reasons?
3. Can you tell me why you have chosen to style your hair like this? What are your reasons?
4. Can you tell me what you think is the most beautiful type of hair? Why?
5. Can you tell me if there is any pressure on you to wear your hair a certain way?
6. When you meet someone for the first time, how are you most likely to style your hair?
7. How would you style your hair when going on a date?
8. In a professional setting or job interview, how would you choose to style your hair?
9. Taking into consideration that there are so many options when choosing to style your hair, do you make a conscious choice when it comes to what particular hair style you wear?
10. Do you love your hair the way it is? If you could change your hair in any way how would you like your hair to be?

B. Chart: Hair Breakdown and Descriptions

| | |
|---------------|--------------------------------|
| PARTICIPANT 1 | Straight hair (not chemically) |
| PARTICIPANT 2 | Straight hair (not chemically) |
| PARTICIPANT 3 | Long braids w/ extensions |
| PARTICIPANT 4 | Straight hair (not chemically) |
| PARTICIPANT 5 | Dreadlocks |
| PARTICIPANT 6 | Small afro |
| PARTICIPANT 7 | Curly |

C. Participant Photographs



Participant # 4



Participant # 5



Participant #6



Participant # 7

Tomorrow's Daughters
By Lebogang Mashile

I want to write a poem
About pretty black girls
Who don't relax and lie their dreams away
Voices that curl
The straight edges of history
Hair thin slices of a movement
Turning the world kinky
I respect the disciplined silent screamers
Who expose the holes
Emily Dickinson, I am climbing through
To your wooden shed of isolation
Where the robin's song
Robbed you of your sanity
I revere people to my own detriment
Perhaps you did too
But when I enter your hallowed hearth
Please don't turn me away
I want to show pretty black girls
How to look at their hearts
With eyes blaring at full blast
The way you did
Together we can build a bridge
To the promise in their faces
And pull them towards poems
By pretty black girls
Wearing crowns of change