Daughters of the comb: exploring consciousness-raising, anchored consciousness, and micro-resistance in the natural hair movement

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Abstract

In the interest of broadening what is known about collective action, collective consciousness, and everyday resistance, I present my analysis of Black women's and men's perspectives of the natural hair movement. The growing preference among Black women to renounce conventional straightening options is contraposition to status quo grooming norms and policies—norms and guidelines that often revere white beauty standards and rebuke Black aestheticism. Whereas protests, demonstrations, picket lines, sit-ins, litigation, and lobbying are many collective actions heavily researched by social movement scholars, my study draws attention to non-contentious resistance. Relying upon in-depth interviews and survey data, I utilize an intersectionality framework synthesized with the theoretical frames of systemic gendered racism, cognitive sociology, and the coding procedures of grounded theory methods to analyze the narratives of Black women and men regarding the trending popularity of natural hair in the United States. I take the position that the natural hair movement is inadvertently modifying, if not expanding the parameters and praxis of social movements. I introduce several concepts to expound upon my theorizing of Black women's and men's perceptions of the natural hair movement, including my novel concepts of anchored consciousness and micro-resistance.

Keywords: Everyday resistance, consciousness-raising, anchored consciousness, micro-resistance, natural hair, United States, systemic gendered racism

Introduction

For many Black women, the process of transitioning from chemically relaxed hair to unaltered hair texture is accomplished in concert with others. On a regular basis, Black women who go natural learn and teach.[1] They make and watch hair videos, read and write hair blogs, extol the benefits and virtues of being natural, and do not tolerate people touching their hair. They are savants in the art of DIY, TWA, 1A to 4B, coconut oil, Jamaican black castor oil, and an expanding catalog

[1] "Going natural" or "being natural," refers to Black women's preference to renounce conventional straightening hairstyles, particularly chemical hair straightening.

of organic ingredients.[2] They scrutinize conventional beauty norms while concurrently encouraging other Black women to go natural. The participant accounts in this study reveal a natural hair thought community; a socio-cognitive community that is structured by beauty and bodywork, body politics, and moderately shared typification of the world. Participants impart that, Black women with natural hair are likely to adopt perspectives that accentuate their ideological proximity to other Black women and some Black men based on hair texture. They come to see women with natural hair as having gone through similar "awakenings" as themselves whereas some, perceive women with chemically straightened hair as *still* anchored to social securities associated with conventional hairstyles and a racist status quo. As such, within Black women's hairstyle choices are concurrent conceptualizations of and resistance to racial power obscured by notions of personal preference and beauty conventions.

In this study, I ask how do Black women and men make sense of the growing popularity of Black women's natural hair. To wear one's curly hair unmodified by straightening methods is contraposition to status quo grooming norms and policies—norms and guidelines that often revere white beauty standards and rebuke Black aestheticism. Hair straightening is a socially desirable norm among Black and non-Black women. For people from racial and ethnic marginalized groups, and Black women specifically, physical characteristics such as skin complexion, and hair texture are markers of shared subordinate status in Western culture's racial hierarchy. Racialized whiteness and all associations with whiteness embody "racial power," or more pointedly, "systemic privilege" (Bonilla-Silva 2003). Thus, when persons of color straighten their hair or use skin-lightening products, the acts are interpreted as attempts to achieve privilege via association with whiteness (Glenn 2008, Lake 2003, Mercer 1990). Symbolic "distancing" from darkness and Black identities is understood as calculated attempts toward a preferable life chance within America's racial hierarchy. In consequence, Black women turning away from mainstream hairstyling norms is provocative.

In their 2013 US Black Haircare Report, industry firm Mintel published that chemical relaxers approximated 21% of the Black hair care market, which accounted for approximately $152 million in revenues in 2012 (Mintel 2013). Mintel reported relaxer sales down 15% since 2011 and approximately 34% since 2009. For years 2013-2015 relaxers sales dropped 18.6%. By 2015, Mintel explicitly attributed the "negatively affected sales of relaxers" to the "natural hair movement" (Mintel Press Team 2015). In the most recent 2021 US Black Haircare Report, Mintel engages affirming language on how to "empower consumers and stylists to care for textured hair," along with references to "holistic health" the "Crown Act" and "social movements" (Mintel 2021).[3] A comparison of their reports from 2013-2021 not only captures the financial impact and designation

[2] Natural hair terms for: DIY (do it yourself), TWA (teenie weenie afro), 1A and 4B are hair texture types from the Andre Walker Hair Type System.

[3] The Crown Act is an anti-hair discrimination legislation. The CROWN acronym stands for "Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair.

of going natural as a "movement," but subsequently, exemplifies that the movement favorably shifted discourse associated with natural hair, marketing campaigns, and ushered in legislation supporting Black hair aesthetics. Overall, preference for natural hair suggests a disruption in individual and collective acceptance of anti-Black beauty ideals.

Negligently, social movements rarely focus on the specific interests and concerns of Black women, meanwhile taking advantage of their labor and participation (Harris 2011). In addition, there persists the enduring criticism that racial solidarity, in its many forms, is predominately male-centric and heteronormative. The natural hair movement (NHM) is not only raising public awareness about hair as a unique and abject site of socio-political struggle for Black women, but it is also mobilizing Black women *and* Black men in solidarity around a social injustice mostly germane to Black women. I take the position that the natural hair movement is inadvertently modifying, if not expanding the parameters and praxis of social movements (Poletta and Jasper 2001). By analyzing how Black men and Black women think across social locations. I explore how race, gender, age, profession, and migration interact in the creation of socio-mental structures that govern individuals' thoughts and behaviors regarding beauty conventions, solidarity, social justice, and resistance. To theorize Black women's and men's perceptions of the natural hair movement, I discuss the role of consciousness-raising and introduce my novel concepts of anchored consciousness and micro-resistance.

Theoretical framework

My study considers that Black women's hairstyle choices occur in a society that normalizes identities, perspectives, and behaviors based upon polarized and hierarchical borders. However, American society has multiple systems of oppression and stratification. Thus, I engage the frameworks of intersectionality and systemic gendered racism to take into account that within American society, there exists racist and sexist oppression, which overlap to, create distinctly different outcomes for men and women of color (Wingfield 2008; Crenshaw 1991). As a theoretical tool, intersectionality offers a framework for analyzing discrimination and the appropriation of social privileges based on arbitrary social divisions. Intersectionality explores how the effects of social divisions such as race, gender, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and political affiliation, influence worldviews and life chances (Collins 2000; Crenshaw 1991).

In addition, I utilize cognitive sociology to explain that human beings are members of "thought communities" and are products of their particular social environments (Zerubavel 1997). Through cognitive socialization, individuals learn how to perceive, focus, classify, signify, reckon time, and remember, as social beings and members of multiple but distinct intersubjective communities. Human membership in multiple thought communities provokes both cognitive social norms among members who have shared experiences and cognitive socio-cultural differences among people with separate community affiliations

(Zerubavel 1997,9). Cognitive pluralism emphasizes the cultural dimension of knowledge acquisition and considers how attitudes and beliefs vary across cultures, within cultures, and across time. Cognitive pluralism unites cognition and sociology into a theoretical perspective that considers cultural influences on human knowledge. I use a synthesis of intersectionality, systemic gendered racism, and cognitive pluralism to engage in a critical analysis of Black women's and men's conceptualizations of natural hair and Black aesthetics as empowering resistances to the status quo.

Research design

The first phase of the study began with the distribution of a survey online via Survey Monkey. The objective of the survey was to collect preliminary data about the respondents' social location (age, ethnicity, marital status, and/ profession), regional location, current and previous hairstyling choices, and general opinions about natural hair and chemically/thermally-straightened hair. Along with providing descriptive information, the survey served as an instrument for screening participants, to participate in a single follow-up, face-to-face or telephoned one-hour, tape-recorded individual interview. In the face-to-face interview, the subject did not have to know how to read, or write, and were not restricted to residing at a valid address or having a phone (Dillman, Smyth, and Melani 2009).

The individual interview was the second phase of my study. I used open-ended, semi-structured questions to probe 20 respondents and to contextualize their preliminary responses gathered from the survey. Face-to-face interviews were conducted for the Atlanta participants. However, I conducted video and phone interviews with out-of-state participants. Interviews lasted between 30 minutes to an hour and were tape-recorded.

Participants were Black men and Black women, over the age of 18 years, and who represented a variety of social locations that vary in ethnicity, marital status, religious affiliations, age, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, political orientation, and health/physical wellness. In the interest of heterogeneity, I selected 20 interview participants from cities that are demographically diverse and have a renowned natural hair community (i.e., Atlanta GA, SFO/Bay Area CA, Washington DC/MD, and NYC) and locales where natural hair is sporadically worn and underrepresented (i.e., Los Angeles CA, Phoenix AZ, and Boston MA) (see Table 1). My objective was to capture a diverse sampling of Black men and women with various levels of familiarity with natural hair and the NHM. The overall goal was to interview enough participants to achieve theoretical saturation.

Although six women with relaxers and fifteen men completed the survey, only one woman with a relaxer and three men volunteered to complete the interview. I attribute the low representation of women with relaxers and men to self-selection and lack of interest in the topic. Women with natural hair and men who favor natural hair are prepared to share their perspectives, meaning they are

primed to discuss the subject. Two men shared that the interview was lengthy, (it took about 10-15 minutes to complete and had 32 questions). In addition to the three men that I interviewed, three additional men volunteered to complete the interview, however, they were non-responsive when it was time to schedule. Considering the exploratory nature of this study it is not immune to limitations. The predominance of natural hair wearers and the limited number of women with diverse textures such as relaxers, thermal styling, and/or weaves among my participants skewed my findings towards those with more positive attitudes and perspectives about natural hair. Overall, I obtained approximately 82 completed survey responses and 20 participants for individualized interviews. All participants interviewed responded favorably towards natural hair. What participants think about natural hair as a social movement is a matter of how they think about hair as a site of shared consciousness, resistance, and personal community.

Consciousness raising

As they discuss kinky hair's stereotypical association with poverty, or critique the characterization of natural hair as unprofessional, with consistency, participants perceive natural hair as a discernible attribute from chemically altered hair and one that externalizes meanings about the wearer's esteem and deference in society. Participant accounts align with scholarship on the natural hair movement—accenting that natural hair has important implications regarding shifts in Black women's understandings of identity, social networks, community, health, self-care, and empowerment (Ellington 2015; Gathers et al. 2009; Neil and Mbilishaka 2019; Bankhead and Johnson 2014). Whether they explicitly perceive natural hair as a social movement or not, opting for natural hair initiates cognitive socialization into a subculture of Black society. Here I examine how members of the natural hair thought community (NHTC) come to rearticulate natural hair, and most particularly, how they conceptualize hair texture as a marker of association and disassociation within the Black collectivity.

Annelle communicates explicit awareness of the natural hair thought community (NHTC) and offers her insights about the perceptions Black women have of each other based on how they wear their hair:

> So, there's a community around hair. Like sometimes, that's how I feel — like, what is hair? I'm not new to it. That's a teaching moment for me, learning to see people awakening. And then it's like, oh, we are one. You actually get to see how you are not one with, but you're connected to, other women and men who may not feel that connected to you in any other way. And there's a disconnection too. I found that, with people that have natural hair and people that have short…chemically processed hair, it's cute, both styles are cute, but there's this energy between those two people, and I'm like, it's hair. But I get it, because so much about us has been used to separate us.

Annelle prefers to decenter the comparative attractiveness between chemical and natural hairstyles and instead draws attention to the "energy" between individuals. Similar to findings from Banks (2000), Annelle conveys that for Black women, hair holds considerable intraracial significance, most particularly status beliefs about the wearers of chemically altered and naturally textured hair. From her perspective, hair emerges as an observable signifier of one's worldview, a mechanism for social connectedness, and one source of bifurcation between Black women and even some Black men. When I asked Annelle how is Black women's hair similar or dissimilar to other women's hair, she did not hesitate to single out "the stigma." She emphasizes that Black women's hair "can't just be hair, it has to mean something." Participant Nzingha agrees, "We have a community. What makes it a social movement, we have a community, there is pride linked with being natural, there's stigma associated with it."

Michaëlle is among several participants, men and women, who consider colorism in their discussion of natural hair. Their beauty and bodywork process include the reconceptualization of Black hair and dark skin as beautiful. Michaëlle:

> I mean, I think I will admit that it has helped me come to the place where I am where I think that I, I finally think that I'm beautiful, in terms of being really dark skinned and [having] really nappy hair! I'm going to say it, nappy hair. Because I see a lot more of it around me. I think definitely, yeah. If I really think about it, yeah. Because it's hard to — you need that affirmation. As a human being, you need that affirmation. So, I think it would have been hard for me if it was still, you know, twenty years later, almost twenty years later, if I was still, like, one of, like, three people, you know.

I interpret Michaëlle's ability to embrace Black women's diverse hair textures as her ability to see herself within mainstream and as part of a spectrum of Black beauty. Like skin complexion, hair texture is a status characteristic that invokes comparative beliefs among Black women about their social ranking along intersecting social statuses. This ranking exists between them and non-Black women as well as between them and other Black women. Annelle, Nzingha, and Michaëlle, like several other participants in the study center overcoming the stigma and shaming of natural hair. Their cognitive processes of destigmatizing natural hair and Black aesthetics bear resemblance to consciousness-raising activism, which they further distinguish from experiences that reify the status quo, or what I term *anchored consciousness*.

Historically, consciousness-raising involved women sharing their personal narratives of discrimination and sexism. Feminists and advocates for women's rights used consciousness-raising processes and activism to help women perceive their personal experiences as common among other women and to ground their mutual experiences as structural constraints and outcomes of systemic oppression. Kathie Sarachild is credited with popularizing consciousness-raising

as a process during the 1960s women's movement (Sarachild 2000). Informed by Marxism, consciousness-raising is a strategy for overcoming false consciousness and attaining class-consciousness, or awareness of common oppression among marginalized individuals and groups. In 1974, radical Black feminists of the Combahee River Collective utilized consciousness-raising in their grassroots formation of a movement for Black Feminism and activism against the "interlocking oppressions" of "racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression" (Taylor 2017). The Combahee River Collective raised awareness of "identity politics" and catapulted the political stance that a Black woman's feminism was necessary to ensure the liberation of Black people and all women of color. Although participants did not mention consciousness-raising specifically, it is interesting how many of them attended Historically Black Colleges/Universities (HBCUs), studied and/or had social science careers, came from politically active families, or found some level of social activism in their life course. Today, Black women social justice activists, academics, politicians, artists, doulas, midwives, and community organizers are the sisters and daughters of the Combahee River Collective. As Sowards and Renegar (2004) argued, "consciousness raising has evolved in style, substance, and function in comparison to previous conceptions of consciousness-raising." The natural hair thought community reflects the posterity of Black feminism and womanist thinking as an ever-evolving Black woman's ideology.

Table 1 Participant Demographics

Participant	Race/ Ethnicity	Gender	Age Range	State of Residence	Education	Employment Status	Occupation	Household Income	Political Orientation	Hair Texture	Natural Hair is a Social Movement
Michaëlle	Black/ Ghanaian	Woman	45-54	GA	BA	Full Time	Physical Therapist	$50k-$74,999	Liberal	Natural	Agree
Endrick	Black/AfAm	Man	18-24	GA	HS	Part Time	Student/Barista	$75k-$99,999	Independent	Natural	Agree
Roberson	Black/AfAm Jamaican	Man	25-34	GA	Some College	Full Time	Personal Trainer/ Bartender	$25k-$49,999	Very Liberal	Natural	Agree
Toure	American	Man	35-44	TX	MA	Full Time	Engineer	$125k-$149,999	Dynamic	Natural	Agree
Ruth	Black/AfAm	Woman	35-44	CO	Some College	Full Time	Clerical	$25k-$49,999	Moderate	Natural	Agree
Sojo	Black/AfAm	Woman	65-74	DC	MA	Retired	Retired	$25k-$49,999	Independent	Natural	Agree
Ella	Black/AfAm	Woman	35-44	NJ	BA	Full Time	Director of Development	$75k-$99,999	Progressive	Natural	Agree
Anelle	Black/AfAm Jamaican	Woman	35-44	IL	BA Some	Part Time	Educator/Film Maker Office Admin/Tenant	$25k-$49,999	Very Liberal	Natural	No Opinion
Kito	American	Woman	25-34	DC	College	Full Time	Coordinator	$25k-$49,999	Liberal	Natural	Agree
Shirley	Guyanese/ Jamaican	Woman	35-44	TX	PhD	Seasonal/ Temp	Lecturer	$100K-$124,999	Very Liberal	Chemically Relaxed	Agree
Ava	Black/AfAm	Woman	35-44	MD	PhD	Full Time	School Psychologist/ Licensed Counselor	$200K+	Liberal	Natural	Agree
Inez	Black/ Brazilian	Woman	35-44	FL	PhD	Full Time	Researcher	$175K-$199,99	Very Liberal	Natural	Agree
Cella	Black/AfAm Jamaican	Woman	35-44	MD	PhD	Full Time	Public Health Researcher	$75k-$99,999	Very Liberal	Natural	Agree
Dorothy	American	Woman	25-34	GA	MA	Full Time	Fellow	$75k-$99,999	Liberal	Natural	Agree
Kamala	Black/AfAm	Woman	35-44	TX	BA	Full Time	Contact Center Representative	$0-$24,999	Liberal	Natural	Disagree
Marjorie	Black/AfAm	Woman	25-34	GA	BA	Full Time	Admin. Jury Division	$100K-$124,999	Very Liberal	Transition Chemical to Natural	Agree
Yumi	Black/AfAm	Woman	45-54	NY	MA	Part Time	Peer Specialist	$0-$24,999	Radical Black Power	Natural	Agree
Octavia	Black/AfAm	Woman	65-74	GA	MA	Retired	Retired	$25k-$49,999	Liberal	Natural	Agree
Billie	Black/AfAm	Woman	*Omitted	GA	BA Some College	*Omitted	Retail Sales	*Omitted	*Omitted	Natural	Agree
Nzingha	Black/AfAm	Woman	18-24	CA	College	*Omitted	Clinical Psychologist/Student	*Omitted	*Omitted	Natural	Agree

Anchored consciousness

In contrast to consciousness-raising, anchored consciousness may be likened to false consciousness. Although Marx (Marx 1972, 2000) described the ideology of false consciousness as a lack of awareness of the systemic (capitalist) dynamics and beliefs held by the proletariat/bourgeois in maintaining the inequitable capitalist structure. Antonio Gramsci's conceptualization of hegemony expanded on Marxist theory and implicates a complex system involving alliances, coercion, and complicity in one's own subordination. Some participants interpret wearing chemically relaxed hair as a form of false consciousness, or hesitancy to decenter systemic gendered framings of beauty and hair grooming choice, often in attempts to circumvent stigma and trade in on the social benefits of complying with white racist grooming conventions. For several participants, overcoming "the stigma" of natural hair serves as a prerequisite for membership into the natural hair community. Although Black men have similar naturally textured hair and often wear similar styles to Black women such as cornrows, locs, and Afros, they are not subject to the same grooming expectations and discriminations as Black women. Likewise, non-Black women are perceived as outsiders to the movement on the grounds of colorism and hair texture stigmas. As such, lines are drawn between Black women with natural hair and various "others" (White women, non-Black women of color, Black women with chemical relaxers, Black women with weaves, and Black men).

Black men

Participants attend to the similar physical properties between Black women's and men's hair but ultimately focus on the unequal social consequences of hair to explain Black men's exclusion from the natural hair movement. Marjorie highlights the fluidity in which Black women and men defy gender norms with men wearing longer hairstyles and women wearing short hairstyles typically reserved for men. However, the majority of participants attend to racialized gender inequity of beauty norms. For example, Ava considers the historicity of Black men's experiences with hair texture in comparison to Black women:

> Well, you know, I think that with the exception of the '40s and '50s, Black men's natural hair texture has been seen as acceptable. As long as it was cut, as long as it was shaped up or edged up, then all they had to do was wash it, moisturize it, brush it, they were fine. They could get a job, they could find a woman, find a mate, wasn't a problem. Black men jumping on that bandwagon is also a bit confusing to me too, because they have not had the pressure to chemically straighten their hair with the exception of the '40s and '50s when they put the conks in their hair, and I don't think that was everybody, I think that was probably just a few.

Although Black men once "conked" (chemically relaxed) their hair and some still apply chemical texturizers to achieve trendy styles, these chemical processes do not overshadow the wearing of their natural hair texture. Black men's careers and interpersonal relationships are not threatened by the wearing of their natural hair texture like that of Black women. Ella considers the particular role Black men have occupied in perpetuating stigma and pressures to conform to beauty standards onto Black women. In some ways, Black men emerge as oppressors or at least coercive authorities. Ella's perspective:

> I feel like there's just so — the relationship between Black men and Black women is so complex, not even in a relationship context, just even being family or being father-daughter, or neighbors or friends or classmates or whatever. I feel like there's so much emotional damage that we both have suffered from slavery, and so I feel like the whole concept of what is a beautiful Black woman is very skewed. Hair plays a lot into whether you're beautiful or not. I think that Black women often do things to their hair because of men, or at least in their mind, they perceive it because of men. It's kind of like relationships in general between Black men and women: sometimes women are timid and won't make a decision because they feel like it's not going to attract a man, or the man won't be happy or whatever, but the reality is that we do have the power, and if we change, then they change. I feel like that is something that natural hair has done. We've turned around what is considered beautiful for Black women, and we didn't ask for permission, we just did it.

Ella considers the direction of influence she perceives Black women have over men, which is surprisingly opposite to the direction of power in the dominant patriarchal culture. Several other participants consider Black men's supportive or discouraging roles in destigmatizing natural hair. Ruth shares that her husband is very supportive of natural hair:

> My husband, his mom has natural hair. I think that something like that sets a precedent, because he's grown up really viewing, admiring women around him who've had their hair natural. His grandmother is a former Black Panther, so he comes from a very socially conscious family anyway. It's not that when I had a perm, he was against it, but it's one of those things where it's like, yeah, you do whatever you feel comfortable with.

Ruth attributes her husband's childhood exposure to his raised consciousness about natural hair. She is aware that her husband's perspective is unique and that some women struggle with going natural in light of their less supportive romantic relationships. Married and partnered women, Sojo, Dorothy, Kamala, Kito, Octavia, and Shirley experience both support and non-approval from their partners. Single participants mention their concerns and struggles in dating with natural hair and various participants including men are aware of their women acquaintances' struggles. As such, Black men are designated opponents, advocates, or allies, adding a gendered consideration to racial solidarity rarely explored in racial solidarity research.

Male participants, Toure, Roberson, and Endrick are aware that the social meanings attached to Black men's hair and Black women's natural hair are racialized and gendered differently. Roberson and Endrick both wear their hair in styles that pronounce Black aestheticism. They are mindful of how they are perceived differently than when their hair was cut low. Although some people interpret their locs and braided styles as "threatening" or "radical," the men are buffered by the knowledge that they can easily cut their hair at any time and navigate the stigmas. For Black women, navigating the stigma of Black aesthetics means chemically altering their hair versus simply altering the style of their natural texture. Toure and Roberson, perceive Black men as potential allies for Black women in their journey toward natural hair. They both share that they learned

from their women acquaintances about the struggles of Black women with grooming norms. They are both purposeful in their learning but also explain how they learn inadvertently via social media posts and a growing body of articles and videos on natural hair. For Roberson, his long natural hair places him in spaces with women stylists. In addition, to care for his hair, he often seeks hair care information that exposes him to Black women's public discourse on discriminatory beauty standards. For men like Toure and Roberson, although they are hesitant to frame themselves as experiencing comparable grooming discriminations as Black women, it was clear from their accounts that some Black men, like some Black women, are becoming more conscious of gendered and racialized grooming discriminations. Learning Black women's specific socio-political concerns, as it relates to hair is dynamic. Black men in this study acknowledge their role in reinforcing beauty norms and in solidarity with Black women, oppose anti-Black grooming standards.

Black women with chemical relaxers

Annelle and Nzingha both wear their hair naturally and acknowledge the existence of a socio-cognitive community of Black women who share a similar outlook surrounding reconceptualizing and learning about hair. Based upon their criteria, members of the natural hair thought community are intimately familiar with the shame and stigma of being natural, and women who have not abandoned chemical relaxers are not members of the community. However, participant Shirley offers a contradiction to their claims. Although Shirley is not natural, Shirley shares the consciousness-raising awareness of members of the natural hair thought community and considers herself included in the movement. Shirley had no intentions of going natural anytime soon. Needless to say, she is well-versed in the culture of the NHTC. Shirley offers an interesting paradox to explain her perspective on inclusion and exclusion in the movement:

> I can see myself included even though I don't necessarily, like, have natural hair — meaning, you know, I process my hair — but I do see myself involved in the movement. It is a movement whereby, you know, people — and this could be men and women — who want to wear their hair how they want or not judged and have the agency to do what they want with their bodies. And I support that. Also, I support my friends who do wear it. I'll give you example. So I have a friend she's natural. She proclaims to be part of the natural hair movement. However, in her wedding, she wanted her bridesmaids to have a straight sleek hairstyle, and said, you know, and she was specifying what she wanted. But one of my friends, she has naturally, very curly hair, and she said no, my hair is not naturally like that, you know? Can I wear my curls? And she was like, no. Put whatever you want in it, but just get it to the style that I want. I was just like — that doesn't make sense. Like, why would she be telling you to, you know, change the texture of your hair and how your hair looks to conform to kind of like, to me and a Eurocentric kind of look. However, in my wedding, even though, I process my hair, all of my bridesmaids, had variations of natural hair. And I was like, that is fine, I want you to be comfortable, it looks good, that's fine. So, even though I don't do it, I — and I wouldn't, like, proclaim myself to be, like, wow, I'm, you know, like, I wear natural hair, and I'm part of the movement or whatever, my bridesmaids couldn't wear whatever they wanted.

Dorothy sees all Black women as included, acknowledging a gendered racial bond:

> I'm like, "Girl, I do this, and this," and we have a whole discussion. I don't have a problem with her touching my hair, because she's been through the struggle, she knows what I'm going through, she knows what my daily interactions are, and what we have to deal with on a day-to-day basis with the others. You know who I'm talking about when I say the others. She gets it, so I don't mind. It's when I know that you haven't been through that struggle, I know that you haven't had to deal with people teasing you for what your hair looks like, or having to go to the hairdresser and straighten your hair before you go to an interview, even though you know that by the time the interview's over, your hair's going to be right back in a big old poof ball because your hair doesn't deal with humidity like that. She gets it. I don't have a problem with her touching my hair. You on the other hand, you don't get it. Don't touch my hair.

However, Dorothy is clear that white women are not allowed to participate in the natural hair movement. Her sentiments of racial exclusivity are shared by several other participants, but not all. Nzingha is clear that having natural hair or being White with "natural hairstyles" or doing the bodywork of having Black aesthetic hairstyles does not give one membership into the natural hair movement:

> Anybody can participate, but — so there's a caveat being that there's emotion linked with certain hairstyles. There's history linked with certain hairstyles. If I see a white girl with an Afro, I might laugh, right? But I also might think it's cute, and I also might be confused about the white girl with the Afro. But a white girl with curly hair can definitely participate in all the stuff that we do with natural hair. I don't think it's [inaudible] — it is, but it also isn't. I have this dissonance about it. Anybody can participate, but at the same time, not anyone can participate because… some people can — you can go straighten your hair and go be imbued with whiteness, and not have to deal with the struggle of continuing all of the stuff that's imbedded within having Black natural hair. When I think of the natural hair movement, I specifically think of Black natural hair… and our natural hairstyles. White people with dreadlocks, white people with Afros, those are weird, but if they want to, do you. I just don't like it, and it's just my opinion.

Her perspective emphasizes racialization and embodiment, a lived experience that many believe non-Blacks and Black men do not experience. Once again, she emphasizes the trauma and the specific social devaluation of natural hair that constructs a specific racialized and gendered struggle, particularly the psychological and consequential social costs. She is explicit that the natural hair movement is tied to "the stuff," the social stigmas but also the resilience that is required to wear natural hair without an out. White women have the option to return to their natural and socially accepted straight hair textures, whereas, for Black women, chemically relaxed hair is the norm or "the out."

Nzingha's boundaries are not shared by all participants. Several participants such as Kito, Shirley, and Toure considered exclusion problematic or at least limiting in creating allies. Here is Kito's perspective:

> I think everybody should be allowed to participate. I think that when it comes to voicing opinions and voicing ideals, I think that's when the discrepancy starts. If you're an ally, then that's fine, but if someone is sitting and telling you they're story, it's not necessarily your place to negate or try to fight with what that person's truth is. If you've never been disenfranchised because of your natural hair, then, in my opinion, you really shouldn't have anything to say. You can support, you can help when help is asked for, but if you've never been penalized for your natural hair, or if you've never been sent home because your natural hair was a distraction, or it was unkempt or something like that, if you've never been — if your job has never been threatened because of your natural hair, I don't think you should really have much to say.

Sojo considers the global community of Black women impacted by discriminatory beauty norms and how research about their experiences impacts non-Black women:

> It's certain things that I think even with you going through your academic process and this whole process of education, it is important, and I'm thankful that you are trying, with this survey, that you're trying to gather women's opinions and how they feel. A survey that I think, across the board, because this impacts even the other women. The thing is, this is something that we can do, that we as Black women — and you know, you can't say American Black because I've seen Ethiopians with hair that looks like mine, and then I've seen some that look like a white girl's hair. So, it's a mixture — we need it! As far as women of color, and a lot of people having these babies that's coming out that have knotty hair and they have straight hair, looking like me, and they don't know? I saw that on the plane when I was flying to Dallas. Little girl was cute and everything, but Lord, they did not know how to do their hair, and I wanted to say, "Can I take her in the bathroom for a minute?"

Sojo extends solidarity to women of color, as well as multiracial families. Sojo's acute awareness of the systemic interconnections of oppression, helps her to conceptualize the natural hair movement as inclusive, and as a multiethnic and multinational community. Similar to findings from Dalmage (2000), the Black community is more likely to open their doors and extend community assistance to white women with Black children. Sojo's perspective demonstrates the lasting effects of the hypodescent (one drop) rule, particularly for older generations. Also embedded in Sojo's account is her concern with the importance of proper grooming and the child's self-esteem. Ava was another participant who mentioned the perceived neglected grooming of biracial children by White mothers. Although Nzingha mentioned that many Black mothers do not know how to groom their daughters' natural hair, however, as participants repeatedly demonstrated they were a part of a community of hairdressers who could at least thermally style to maintain their presentability.

Not all participants perceive non-Black women, particularly White women as members of the natural hair social movement. Most participants reinforce racial boundaries, taking offense or finding "humor" in White women's use of the "going natural" verbiage or wearing of Black aesthetic hairstyles. Very few participants accepted White women's inclusion into the natural hair movement. However, Sojo and Ava recognize that multiracial families have Black children—or that the phenotypes we assign as Black and white exist across racial categories. As Shirley states:

> Oh wow. I mean, let's see. Who is allowed to participate, and who's not? I mean, I guess, who am I to tell someone they're not allowed to support and do anything that, you know, furthers a cause? Because, I mean, I've heard discussions, you know, with peers, that, you know, white people are involved, in movements like these, I also tell them that, white people also have Black and biracial children. I guess, for me, if you have a genuine affinity and also a purpose, in a sense, or if you feel that you — this issue is for you to either put yourself on the line for and advocate for, it doesn't mean that you…when you know it could benefit. I think, yeah, that the movement is for you.

Shirley argues that individuals across racial categories may also be allies in the socio-mental struggle to exalt natural hair as normative, leaving room not only for participation but allowing collective action beyond the roles of spectator and bystanders, and free-riders. The salience of perceived shared characteristics can be misleading. For example, although two Black women may have different hairstyles and hair textures, leading them to believe they are dissimilar in their socio-political beliefs, a conversation could yield that they are more alike than their hair projects. It is not uncommon for women with differing choices in hairstyles to attend the same social clubs/organizations, to be members of the same communities of faith, or to grow up in the same household. Several participants interpret chemically altered hair texture as adhering to the status quo, a behavior that does not require the same bodywork and emotional investment as wearing one's hair naturally. The markedness of chemically altered hair texture exemplifies that being natural is based on a particular grievance with the meanings attached to chemical hair and cultural ideas about certain favorable and unfavorable attributes.

Framing natural hair as a social movement

After asking participants to define natural hair and why natural hair is currently popular among Black women, I asked them to share their thoughts about the current popularity of natural hair being called a social movement. In addition, I asked participants if they see themselves as part of the movement. I asked these questions regardless of the interviewee's age, sex, and hair texture. All but two participants conceptualize natural hair as a movement, however, several are hesitant to consider natural hair a movement involving political change. When asked to provide descriptions or examples of social movements, participants often focus on iconic movements that involve visible protest, policy demands, and complex social organizations and networks. They rarely mention smaller, subversive movements, or non-contentious movements. Although my findings indicate that participants similarly redirect their pattern of thinking about natural hair as it relates to health, beauty, and Black aesthetics, their perspectives are varied in their specific framing of natural hair as a social movement. By attending to Black men's and women's diverse social locations, and traditional characteristics of social resistance and injustice, several participants perceive incongruities in labeling natural hair a social movement.

The majority of participants, eight out of twenty, conceptualize the growing popularity of natural hair among Black women as a movement centering on cultural expressions of pro-Black aestheticism, which I typify as a culturalist framing. Seven of the twenty participants utilized an activism framework to perceive natural hair through a social justice lens, either perceiving natural hair as its own activism or part of a broader

movement for social change. For a smaller number of participants, five out of twenty conceptualize popularity as personal, convenient, or an indicator of individualism. Participants utilizing an individualist frame, do not subscribe to a personal framing of natural hair as political or cultural but are aware of the broader social movement connotations for others. Only one participant did not see natural hair as a movement of any sort.

I conceptualize the three frames along a continuum in which activist and individualist framings are distinct extremes from one another and culturalist is a midpoint. The two extremes share similar characteristics of abiding by certainty in their perception of natural hair as either a collective social movement or not. Whereas activist and individualist framings both display rigidity, within the culturalist framing there is more flexible or fuzzy-mindedness. Thus, those framing from a culturalist lens may likely share conceptualizations closer to either of the two extremes. For example, both Cella and Ella express a culturalist framing of natural hair; however, Cella's perspective is more aligned with an individualist framing in that she perceives natural hair as a possible medium for racial solidarity for Black people but less a social justice issue or act of resistance. Ella, on the other hand, discusses natural hair in relation to injustices and resistance in ways that are closer to an activist framing. Not only was I able to identify four dimensions common in participants' framings of natural hair, but similar patterns in their overlap among three framing types. For example, the activist framework often includes an overlap of inclusivity of the four dimensions whereas the individualist framework includes an overlap of exclusivity among the four dimensions. I analyze the four dimensions of personal community, racial solidarity, social justice, and resistance that emerge as the criterion that inform the culturalist, activist, and individualist framings of natural. hair (See Figure 1 and Table 2).

Table 2 Framing and Dimension Categorizations

Framing	Participant	(+) Dimensions	(+/-) Dimensions	(-) Dimensions
Individualist	Billie		PC	RS/SJ/R
	Dorothy		PC/RS	SJ/R
	Kamala			PC/RS/SJ/R
	Michaëlle	PC		RS/SJ/R
	Ruth	PC		RS/SJ/R
Culturalist	Annelle	PC/R	SJ/RS	
	Cella	PC	RS	SJ/R
	Ella	R/SJ/PC		RS
	Endrick	PC/R		RS/SJ
	Inez	PC/R	SJ/RS	
	Shirley	PC/SJ	RS/R	
	Toure	PC/SJ	RS/R	
	Yumi	RS/PC		SJ/R
Activist	Ava	PC/RS/SJ/R		
	Kito	PC/RS/SJ/R		
	Marjorie	PC/RS/SJ/R		
	Nzingha	PC/SJ/R	RS	
	Octavia	RS/SJ/R		PC
	Roberson	PC/RS/SJ/R		
	Sojo	PC/RS/SJ/R		

*PC= Personal Community R= Resistance RS=Racial Solidarity SJ= Social Justice

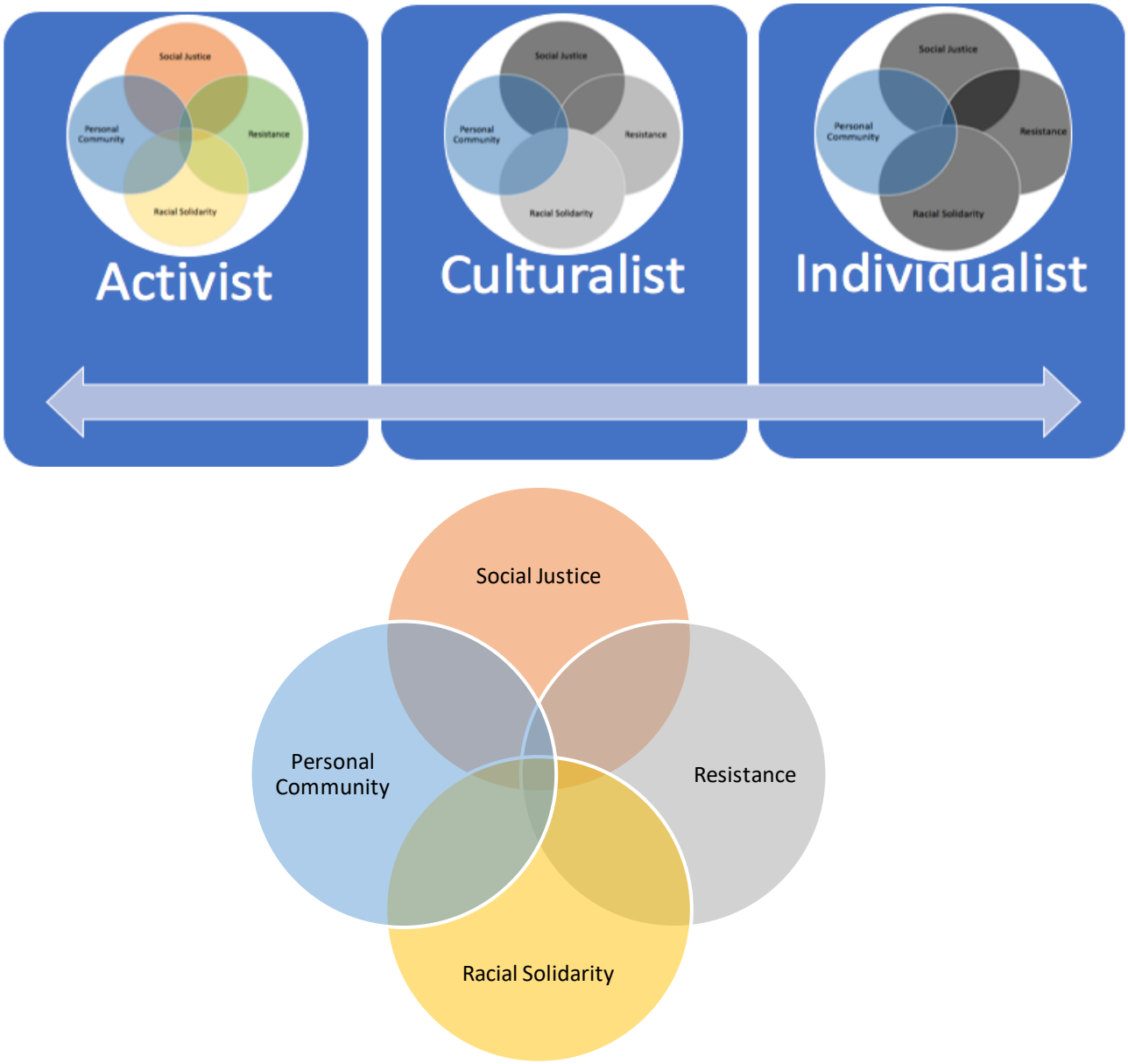

Figure 1 Social Movement Dimensions

Social injustice

I learned from participants that "social" does not always mean "political." Endrick, like several other participants initially opposes the social movement label, "I think in one sense, it's kind of contrarian, because it's like, you know, it's the way your hair is naturally, why should that be a movement?" Annelle also struggles with the social versus political implications of labeling natural hair a movement. She discloses that she associates social movements with social justice and that, before our interview, she was unfamiliar with the designation of natural hair as a social movement:

> Yeah, yeah. That's the way — it's definitely nuanced, definitely nuanced, and I mean, I hadn't heard it. I hadn't heard it. Plus, when you say social, I

> immediately think social justice, and then I immediately think who's — I say younger people, I do think that millennials, I think that's thirty and under, they are on it. They are fighting, they are educating themselves and they're educating others, and how do they look? Everybody looks like they're a part of this conversation right here.

Although Annelle is disappointed by the stigmatization of Black aesthetics and is critical of the hair texture hierarchy, she does not conceptualize going natural as a response to an injustice or crisis. During the interview, Annelle eventually decides that the social movement moniker is a label emerging from the "millennial" generation, a campaign that she sees herself aged out of. Not that she relegates social justice issues as strictly youthful matters but that she perceives a trajectory in one's awareness and responses to social inequality. Likewise, Octavia and Ella both refer to themselves as "veterans" and "old heads" and discuss their youthful engagement in historical movements, the Million Man March and the Civil Rights Movement. All three participants share a profound awareness of systemic gendered racism. Whereas Octavia, the elder of the three women is comfortable equating the movement with injustice, Annelle and Ella both interpret the current popularity of natural hair as acquiring a level of social acceptance that blurs injustice. Ella compares the trajectory of hip-hop with the natural hair movement to explain how Black culture may start as subversive or counterculture to dominant ideology and oppression but once accepted into the mainstream, the movement becomes far less subversive and more so another Western commodity:

> I feel like, to our credit, we've sort of forged a way, so they do have the opportunity to do that now. I think we took a hit like at least 15, 20 years ago, maybe even 25 or earlier, because there were groups of us who were just like, fuck it, I'm going to just do what I want. I feel like, that's the push that mainstreamed it — because we just wouldn't stop. We weren't backing down. Then we started creating products, and then we started having these hair shows, and then it spilled out into mainstream society. Now it's a bit in commodified state, which is a little scary. I feel like, I don't want Black women's hair or natural hair to go the way of hip hop. I feel like there are things that Black culture particular in America has created, and it created it for different reasons, some of it was resistance, some of it was just like a confluence of different cultures — like hip hop music. I feel like as soon as corporate America got into it and realized that it was money, and then realized that it could be commodified, it diluted hip hop extremely, and not to say that we don't have it, but the mainstream and the underground are like two polar opposites, and I don't want that to happen to Black women's hair. I don't want it to become so commodified that you're having a white person in a salon saying, "Why don't you come in and I can show you how to do this stuff with your hair."

Ella's reflection draws out a timeline of natural hair stigmatization and acceptance. Ella is skeptical of the commodification and concerned with cultural appropriation.

At the end of his interview, Endrick expresses curiosity about other Black men's and women's framings of natural hair as a movement. I shared that some participants were adamant that it was political, and some saw it as a cultural or personal choice. Endrick shares these concluding thoughts on the social movement classification:

> I think perhaps it's worth noting that I think maybe it's possible for it to be classified as social without being necessarily political. Because I think — if you classify it as being political, then I think, like you said, it's very easy, it's much easier to draw connections, you know, that aren't necessarily related inherently to the movement, or rather, to natural hair and embracing the naturalness of your hair. Because, you know, when things tend to get political it becomes about something else entirely.

Interestingly, Endrick, one of the youngest participants also is critical of aligning natural hair with social justice and resistance. Endrick considers natural hair an embrace of one's Blackness and Afrocentricity. He perceives the popularity of natural hair as part of a "broader" global movement for Black self-love and racial uplift. Like Endrick and Annelle, several participants express moral objections to politicizing natural hair. In addition, many want to avoid making generalizations on behalf of all Black people regarding their reasons for going natural. Dorothy is first-generation born American and is taken aback by the way "Black people in the U.S. love to politicize everything:"

> In terms of politicizing it, people who are natural and are very much into social activism or into politics, it's like, I'm going to span the room and spot somebody. I'm going to assume now that you have taken up a certain political view or I'm going to assume ownership of that person because of their appearance, pretty much. I guess, growing up, I don't really buy, I don't really play into it. It's kind of like, you know — but it works on both ways. If you see a woman who has her hair chemically straightened, should I now assume that you're not politically active because you decided not to wear your hair natural? So, you're not as knowledgeable now because you don't have your hair in a natural state? I think that it's mutually exclusive.

Dorothy frames natural hair from an individualist lens, and highlights that simply "scanning a room" and making assumptions about an individual's socio-political awareness and activism based on their hair may yield an erroneous "ownership of that person because of their appearance."

Michaëlle admits to struggling with her perspectives about natural hair. Although she is averse to framing natural hair as a social movement, she frames boundaries of inclusion and exclusion on who is allowed to be natural or participate in the movement:

> Every time she [Rachel Dolezal] comes on TV, I just want to scream and throw something at her. Which, again, is hypocritical, right? Because it's like, I think that — like I say, intellectually, I know that the more that we see each other's differences and recognize when somebody is being discriminated against, attacked or stereotyped for their differences, the better it is, but then on the other hand, I'm like, ugh! [laughter] And I think I'm that way because I think that you couldn't possibly know how I feel and what goes on with me. That's so hypocritical, when I say it out loud, I'm like, I realize how hypocritical that is, you know? Because I want them to understand my struggle, you know? But then I don't — then I'm upset when they seem to.

Michaëlle's perspectives are impacted by her "visceral" reaction to non-Black women's inclusion and yet she understands how some of her views are "hypocritical." Unlike Michaëlle, Dorothy is antipathetic towards the politicizing of natural hair and racial solidarity as well as her involuntary membership in the personal community, thus expressing a rigid mindedness. Michaëlle and Dorothy attribute their perspectives to being raised outside of the U.S., or in the case of Dorothy, being first-generation U.S. born and raised. When asked in what ways has the natural hair social movement affected her decision to participate in social activities not related to natural hair, if at all, Michaëlle centers her status as a "foreigner":

> I don't think it has. I think that me being a foreigner from Canada and coming here in my mid-twenties, I did not have any political thoughts, I don't think, really, until I came here. And I think that the politics and the colorism here is way more of an influence than hair.
>
> Like — and I'm sure — I mean, colorism and hair go together, but for me, it was more when I came here. I didn't really have any political — my political beliefs were formed here. And I have to say, unfortunately for the negative, watching the change in the party who was in power, and just my feelings about, like — I didn't realize that I was so into fairness and everybody — like, people don't start out in life at the same place, and it's just not fair!

Michaëlle shares that her racial awareness has heightened since living in the United States, so much so that she is now more aware of the racism towards Indigenous peoples in Canada. She explains that although her family was the only Black family in her community, her father was a doctor and thus buffered their family from discrimination. Michaëlle repeatedly emphasizes that colorism has impacted her racial identity in the U.S. more so than hair texture. She shares that she has an older sister who is just as dark as her and another sister who is biracial and has hair and complexion that in the U.S. would be exalted. However, in her family, there was never a distinction made between the sisters' hair textures and complexions. She experiences racial socialization as a secondary socialization, in that her racial consciousness is forged in response to racism, colorism, and other socio-political discriminations in the United States. Research from Ogundipe (2011) finds that ethnic identities among African immigrant and diasporic African immigrants are often differentiated and sometimes shaped by the racialized experiences of Black Americans. Blacks born outside of the United States may distance themselves, shun, or learn from the historical and current discriminations of Black Americans in constructing their own ethnic identities in America and thus reject a Pan-African racial solidarity.

As such, by attending to Black men and women's diverse social locations and traditional characteristics of social resistance and injustice, several participants perceive incongruities in labeling natural hair a social movement. Whereas Endrick and Annelle frame natural hair from a culturalist framework, Dorothy and Michaëlle draw upon their "foreign" identities to account for their individualist framings of natural hair. However, participants Inez and Shirley both were born outside of the United States but centered from culturalist frameworks. Interestingly, both Inez and Shirley have higher degrees in the social sciences. Participants' repertoire of collective action is informed by their intersecting social locations. The more thought communities that participants belong to, the more unique their perspectives, and yet we see how similar overlaps create shared

intersubjective framings about natural hair as a social justice issue.

Resistance

Participants who frame from an activist perspective are more likely to perceive natural hair as an act of resistance compared to participants who frame otherwise. Dimensionalizing natural hair as an act of resistance commonly includes perceiving grooming norms as racially biased, discriminatory, and unjust. Roberson is among the few participants who convey an in-depth perspective of natural as a resistance to systemic oppression. He implicates "society" norms, institutionalization, and ideological conformity as well as discriminatory sanctioning in the stigmatization of natural hair and thus coerced "assimilation" to wear one's hair weaved, straightened, or "processed." Roberson sees going natural as a human rights issue and an extension of a broader Black rights movement. According to Roberson, the Black Lives Matter movement is the millennial generation's Civil Rights movement, and natural hair allows Black women and men to construct a unified identity around their common oppression and culture. Like Roberson, Sojo perceives a connection between broader socio-political oppression such as police brutality, economic deprivation, and "Eurocentric" beauty norms:

> That's what I don't understand. But we won't spend that kind of money — to me, the hair movement is going to make us start supporting each other, and then our economics will grow, and then our communities — because the hair, the hair care products, I mean — that's I'm sure one of the biggest industries in the world. But do something, give something back. Give something back, and that's where I'm at with the movement, is that we have to give back. Because the generations in between me and these kids so far in between, that we really have to start working with them. We have not only hair, we have mental health, we have diabetes, we have the high blood pressure. I've never seen so many sick people in my life.

Roberson and Sojo are in the minority among participants, in that they equate natural hair with activism. Their framing of natural hair extends beyond agency as they attend to the systemic dynamics of oppression and how natural hair is interrelated to other life chances.

Participants who do not perceive natural hair as a social justice issue are less likely to perceive natural hair as an act of resistance. When asked who or what discourages Black women from going natural, several participants such as Cella and Dorothy acknowledged structural constraints such as professional grooming standards but held firm that "half of it is the woman herself, just kind of holding herself back." By framing going natural as a personal choice or cultural expression, participants minimize grooming norms and guidelines as consequential and instead attend to personal agency. Decentering structural constraints and centering agency, depoliticize wearing natural hair or going natural as an act of radical resistance.

Personal community

As Nzingha shared some people went natural without the assistance of a community, however, in the present day; Black women are frequently guided through the transitional, chemical-to-natural process via a host of resources. The promotion of

natural hair via websites, natural hair salons, and hair conferences among other natural hair activities allows some participants to align themselves with other individuals who engage in similar actions. Participants rely upon various social statuses such as age, gender, hair choice, and nationality/ethnicity to construct their connectedness or disconnectedness to the natural hair movement. For example, Annelle perceives natural hair as a medium for connectedness between Black women with natural hair and yet she is hesitant to include herself as a member of the natural hair social movement:

> In terms of a social movement, I do feel kind of excluded. Nappy and natural and all this, you know, sometimes feeling like an OG. This one woman was asking me questions about my hair and she kept saying yes ma'am, yes ma'am, and I'm like, how am I feeling in this moment right now? What is really going on? I made a joke, she told me she was military, but I still had a feeling. Like yeah, OG, I've been doing this for so long, because it's just me, it's not the movement for me, and I don't care about being on the front line for it. And then, because it is so fly, right, and it costs so much to be fly for the majority of the styles that I see and I like, I feel excluded. I'm not doing — hey! I'm not doing that. I can't do that. But people ask questions, so I do feel included. People comment as if they understand, whatever, so I feel included. I still hear that, you can do it, not everybody can do it. Oh, let me stop you there. Because then there becomes this issue of separation again.

Somewhat similar to Annelle, Octavia conceptualizes the natural movement as a youthful movement that she has aged out of partially because she does not see many options for grey hair, "I don't... yeah, I don't think it's a movement for me." However, like Annelle, public interactions with others often yield acknowledgments that she is included:

> Well, it's not big in my age group. So, it's not the in thing to do but I think that, and most of the compliments I get are from younger people, but I think that's a signal, too, that I like. That they recognize that, "Ok, um, she's with it."

Both Annelle and Octavia focus on hairstyles as a gauge for their inclusiveness in the movement. Their lumping and splitting of inclusion are related to the types of natural hairstyles that they perceive as more oppositional to beauty norms and convention versus some natural hairstyles that maintain presentability. Also, like Annelle, Octavia uses the analogy of the military "front line" about the younger generation's inclusion in the movement. For Annelle, the frontline is the millennial generation (mid 30's to mid 20's) and for Octavia the frontline is Generation X and Millennials (late 40's to early 20's). Whereas Annelle and Octavia consider age and other's acknowledgment as their gauge for personal community, Dorothy is apprehensive about affiliating herself with a natural hair movement and community:

> I would say — see, I don't really, I don't feel excluded or included, to be quite honest. I don't... I don't know if I see myself involved in it... from a group level, but I see in terms of my individual level. For instance, because I am a nurse, because I work in a really professional setting and I've chose to wear my hair in

> a natural state regardless, it may make people somewhat uncomfortable, it may not, and so I think just seeing it, and people being exposed to it, it contributes to it in a sense of it being normalized. But it's not to me — I don't consider myself to be actively involved in it.

Dorothy shares that as a first-generation American, she "was not conditioned to wear" her hair permed. This lack of "conditioning" likely contributes to her not feeling a sense of personal community in relation to going natural. She is aware that others perceive her as part of the community, and that she involuntarily contributes to narratives about natural hair wearers. Billie shares a similar perspective of involuntary inclusion:

> Included, but not because of any active effort on my part. Because like I said, I got dreads because I was wearing braids for so long, and so I was just like, I wear the same style everyday anyway, so why not just get dreads? Like I said, I get people all the time who are just like, "Yes, a natural sister," and I'm just like, "Oh, thank you." I feel kind of bad because I feel like other people, they make this big giant conscious decision, and I just decided to get dreads one day. Constantly walk up to you like, "Oh, you're a woke sister," so, there's that. That's about it really. I do feel like there's a lot of jobs I wouldn't have gotten prior to the natural hair movement because nobody wants to be deemed as a racist establishment, and I don't really go for banking jobs and things like that. I feel like it's a lot more inclusive for me, so that's beneficial. And there's a lot more variety of products that I can use, so that's good.

Billie expresses a feigned "guilt" over others' assumptions that she shares a similar conscientiousness in going natural. Being called a "woke sistah" implies that she engages in a level of consciousness-raising that aligns her having natural hair with radical intent or awakening to overcome the self-consciousness of wearing an unconventional style. Billie's motives for going natural were based upon convenience, and yet she acknowledges that she benefits as a free-rider. Billie is mindful that the natural hair movement, or others' radical intentions and motives paved the way for her to wear her hair naturally without as many social consequences. Several other participants also frame natural hair as an individual choice and equate personal community with beauty and bodywork.

Racial solidarity

Although Annelle introduces us to a thought community of natural hair wearers, she also ruminates that "so much has been used to separate us." Annelle shares her perception of natural hair as a gateway to personal community and yet an obstruction to racial solidarity. Annelle's reflection touches on the enigmatic charge for racial solidarity expected between Black people as well as structural constraints and the diffuse interests, values, and goals by which Black women and men organize themselves. Annelle's perspective echoes Shelby's (2002) argument that racial solidarity based upon common national identity and interests is far more elusive than solidarity centered on common oppression. Participants from different countries, age groups, and occupations demonstrate how a singular racial identity—even one centered on mutual experiences related to hair—ignores how individuals are members of multiple thought communities; which further narrows their perspectives to distinct worldviews. In response to my

question "should all Black people support the natural hair movement," many participants express variations in their expectations for racial solidarity centered on hair. Several participants feel racial solidarity should be reserved for more "serious" racial injustices such as police brutality. Nonetheless, some participants such as Cella subscribe to a universal racial solidarity:

> I think all Black people should support all Black people period. On everything. We just need to support each other more. I don't think we support each other enough. We don't support Black businesses as much as we should, so just in general, I feel like our support of each other is waning. I think that Black people should embrace the Black hair natural — the popularity of natural Black hair.

Participants who utilize an activist or culturalist framing of natural hair are more likely to associate natural hair with racial solidarity or at least prescribe racial solidarity in support of natural hair and/or Black empowerment.

Conclusion: micro-resistance

For the marginalized, within systemic gendered oppression, quality of life is compromised daily whether explicitly acknowledged or not. Avoidance of assimilation or embracing non-conventional options shifts the perimeters of choice. Per Foucault (1977, 1982) the body is a site of struggle, an idea that is reinforced by my participants' accounts of struggle with tiers of surveillance, gatekeeping, and coercive authority. Hair texture along with skin complexion discloses social location without consent of the individual, and thus the actions and embodiment of the individual often convey public messaging about group activity. For example, Octavia does not see herself as part of the movement but engages in subversive behaviors to bring social awareness to gendered racism surrounding the Black body as well as support for those she sees as "doing the work" of Black racial progress:

> I complain when they don't have the right shades or the right products. I make remarks, like, "This isn't nude." Like, "This isn't one size fits all," you know. That kind of thing. When they give a giveaway, I give them back. You buy a certain amount of cosmetics, they give you a little make-up bag and it has freebies? I take all the pink stuff out and give it back to them. They always say, "You don't want this?" I say, "No. I can't use any of that and no sense of throwing it away. Give it to somebody who can use it." And...so, I just make my little statements.

I contended that micro-resistance is everyday resistance informed by longstanding grievances and the successes of previous social movements. It is the class, race, and gender progress that informs and enables Black people to expend temporal, economic, and socio-mental resources towards correcting and/or addressing covert impositions on their quality of life. Micro-resistance is collective agency informed by pluralistic collective consciousness or cognitive pluralism. Although several participants with natural hair report similar experiences with degradation, family criticism, public scrutiny, and professional obstructions, their intersecting social statuses, particularly their privilege divert their attention from perceiving their experiences as oppressive and

constraining. Occupying middle-class social statuses, having stable partnerships, and various levels of autonomy and community support provide resources that allow participants to assert "agency" to navigate grooming constraints. However, expending one's individual and communal resources overshadows persisting systemic oppressions. For example, framing natural hair as a health initiative allows Black women to address health disparities related to grooming habits but minimize or disattend to structural implications and the institutionalized grooming standards that exacerbate their health disparities. The ability to enact agency to address systemic gendered oppression modifies racialized and gendered inequity but does not annihilate it. An activist framing of natural hair involves focusing on systemic gender oppression, whereas an individualist framing is less likely to consider systemic oppression, however, my findings indicate that two individuals with polarizing framings of natural hair as a social movement may very well be members of the NHTC.

Several participants, who were natural for 15 years or more before the current movement considered themselves the veterans or "O.G.s" of the movement. The veterans transitioned during college or at a point in their life course where they encountered social ostracism for being the first but less long-term professional risks because they were somewhat incubated by social spaces that allowed for consciousness-raising. Participants mentioned going natural while in college, attending HBCUs, at the height of hip-hop, or while retired, or in transition between careers. Space and place factor into the ongoing development of the natural hair thought community and reflect a trajectory of conceptualizations for going natural via a timeline of stigmatization to mainstre aming. The popularity of natural hair creates the illusion of acceptance and thus diminishes how Black natural hair and the embracing of Black aesthetics are subversive to the dominant ideology. Mainstream acceptance may change the social landscape, but systemic changes are the only way to disrupt dominant ideology. Often, as Ella pointed out via methods such as commodification, hegemony will absorb countercultures in ways that diminish its subversive momentum. As such, the natural hair movement is one phase of resistance, but an important phase, nonetheless.

Going natural is but one form of Black micro-resistance. I argue that other activities involving a growing Black population of participants in activities such as homeschooling, yoga, travel groups, community gardens, and POC social collectives are also micro-resistance. According to Sojo it is through relationships that Black women quietly mobilize and sustain the natural hair movement:

> This movement, it is a movement, it's a quiet movement, and you bringing it right on out. Because it is a movement. I know one of the sisters that does my hair, they went, her and another young lady went to a workshop of a lady that has invented or patented the Sisterlocks.[4] They went to one of her — she had something for the weekend here one time, and they went and they talked about how good it was. What is so significant which aligns with this is a lot of those sisters are still networking together that met at that conference. That's been at least three to five years ago. But they're still in contact, so that's the other thing we need — relationships. That's my take on it.

[4] Sisterlocks are micro-sized locs that are formed by interlocking loose "Afro-textured" hair. Interlocking is a technique that requires a hooking tool and is very similar to crocheting. See Sisterlocks.com

It is the exclusion as well as the marginalization of Black culture that often prompts the racialization of these activities and lifestyles. How the marginalized utilize their social privileges to improve their quality of life is a counteraction. However, as demonstrated by participants who frame going natural as an expression of individualism, some do not see their actions as collective resistance. Ella demonstrates how a generalized repertoire of contention and collective action informs participants' reluctance to understand the popularity of natural hair as a movement:

> Well, I think part of it is, is that we never had a meeting, organized around it. It was completely organic. That's why I feel like it is something that — and it was subtle, and it was almost not said. Even now, I can see sisters, or especially when I was twisting whatever, and I would see sisters, or I would have my hair — especially if women were older, they would just kind of look at me and nod and smile, almost like, I'm really glad you're doing this. It was subtle, and it was quiet. I think that's another reason why it probably took hold, because there wasn't a leader, there wasn't rhetoric or dogma around it — we just did it. You're still kind of doing it, and I think for me, the — not really the fear, but the danger is what happens when your resistance goes from subtle to overt.—

For participants and many Americans, the repertoire of resistance is based on iconic movements that engage contentious methods. The origins of movements are often overshadowed in history by organized and mobilized actions and draw attention to widespread subversive actions. For example, history now tells the story of Claudette Colvin, the fifteen-year-old who refused to give up her seat on a bus, some nine months before Rosa Parks (Glasrud and Pitre 2013). Individuals engaging in subversive behaviors suffer individualized spoiled identity. Observable subversive or unconventional behavior can have many interpretations but may simulate replication by additional social actors.

For the marginalized, within systemic gendered oppression, quality of life is compromised daily whether explicitly acknowledged or not. Avoidance of assimilation or embracing non-conventional options shifts the parameters of choice. Black people in different social locations experience divergent interactions that affect their perspective of justice and social injustice or resistance. Dorothy's shares her perspectives about anti-Black discrimination:

> At the root of it is just discriminatory practices based on appearance, right? If you want to take it one step further, Shaquita Bonquita Jones might not have natural hair, but that doesn't mean she can't be discriminated against in terms of hiring, because guess what? People look at your name, and we already know, studies have already shown that Black people are discriminated against, even before you get a job offer, just based on just funneling through a chart. Oh, that's — no, we don't want that one. I think because there is that underlying portion in terms of names, I think for that reason, I think all Black people should support [the natural hair movement]. I had one more thing to add, to me, when I say support, it doesn't mean to say that you can't have your hair in whatever state you want it. Just advocating.

Dorothy references "Shaquita Bonquita Jones," to highlight discrimination in employment and other institutions based on Black or ethnic names. Though Dorothy frames natural hair from an individualist framework she is aware of intersecting race, gender, and class biases. Dorothy is of the mindset that racial solidarity in the form of advocacy should consider the variant ways "appearance" or being Black is discriminatory.

Overall, participant experiences contribute to a broader conversation about advocacy and racial solidarity as an investment in all forms of injustice. According to Sojo, Shirley, and Billie the advocacy and solidarity must extend to not only Black bodies, but to all bodies. I agree with their perspectives and argue that destigmatizing Black bodies also involves consciousness-raising among the stigmatized and those who are adjacent and furthest away from experiencing stigma and marginalization. Natural hair serves as a public site of resistance. It is subversive and for some simply an alternative that happens to be oppositional or alternative to the status quo.

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