

IF THIS SHOP COULD TALK: A DISCURSIVE ANALYSIS OF THE
LIBERATORY FUNCTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF AFRICAN
AMERICAN BEAUTY SALONS AND CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

“If This Shop Could Talk: A Discursive Analysis of The Liberatory Function and Development of African American Beauty Salons and Culture” explores the intersection of political consciousness, aesthetics, and community development engendered in quintessential and atypical locales of African American beauty culture with an emphasis on the African American beauty salon as a discursive space. As it seeks to expand limited understandings of African American beauty culture, this analysis employs Afrocentric, Black Feminist, and Womanist theoretical perspectives as it traverses temporal and geographic boundaries. As proclamations of Black pride and beauty are juxtaposed in present day society against a multitude of headlines that detail stories of discrimination based upon hair, this work addresses matters of how and why African women assert such prideful proclamations amidst injustice. How do African American women know that there is power in beauty? Why do African American women believe such a thing? Why do African American women engage in beauty culture and beauty salons?

This work focuses on 20th through 21st century America, by exploring Black beauty culture concepts and byproducts including trends, styles, community activism, and consciousness as connected to African history in Kemet, African history in West Africa prior to the Transatlantic slave trade, and African history in America between the 16th and 21st centuries. This work employs discourse analysis and Afronography to reveal and assert the existence of a unique epistemology within African women’s beauty culture that has been employed in the subversion of oppression and the assertion of Black female identity in America. An Afronographic research study accompanies this analysis and

represents qualitative findings from interviews conducted with women who identify as persons of African descent and members of intergenerational family beauty practice, where women in their families preceded them in beauty service provision. The researcher's perspective is also included throughout the work as she is a licensed cosmetologist and member of an intergenerational family of beauty practice. Ultimately, this work suggests that there is a unique, significant, and sacred agency that exists in the phenomena, traditions, history, and locations of African American beauty culture which has generated aesthetic creations in hair, skin and nails that rhetorically shift paradigms, in addition to words, actions, and feelings that foster an epistemology that can aid in the liberation of Africans in the United States and abroad.

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To all of the Black girls and women across the globe who think that your unique style, thoughts, perspective, and ideas are misunderstood, may you find this work as a base for you to assert yourself to the world; the work I do is for you, you are beautiful and powerful beyond measure.

May this only be the beginning of efforts to expand the scope of understanding and autonomy of African descended women from a perspective that centers our perspectives.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

A fundamental question that all Black women, irrespective of skin tone, hair type and socio-economic class have asked themselves at one point in time is: what am I going to do with my hair? Black hair, in all its manifestations, must always be contemplated.

—Cheryl Thompson, “Black Women, Beauty, and Hair as a Matter of Being”

Statement of the Problem

African women’s hair has become a vogueish topic in media across the globe.

From the continent of Africa to television screens in Europe, news outlets in the Caribbean, halls of litigation in the United States, and the boundless annals of social media, discussions of African women’s hair persist. In 2019 New York, California, and New Jersey deemed natural hair discrimination illegal and in 2020, Virginia, Colorado, Washington, and Maryland joined that group of states. Hair discussion topics include styles, rights, economics, health, and more, however, the origin of such important discourse is ignored. The source of such substantial discussion pertaining to African women’s identity and hair is beauty culture and more specifically, the beauty salon. Initiatives to interpret and express African American women’s identity can advance through a historical indoctrination and knowledge of the rhetorical tradition of African American beauty culture and salon discourse. However, there is a historical disconnection that prohibits the consideration of beauty salon discourse as a legitimate part of a rhetorical continuum of African female radical identity.

Since the dawn of the twentieth century, the beauty salon has been one of the most significant discursive spaces for African American women. Latent within the African American beauty salon is a hybrid of female empowerment doctrines, modes of education, and dynamic theories which are often overlooked, relegated to aesthetics, or

have yet to be identified. Various works have been produced to illuminate the beatitude, political, and economic aspects of beauty culture, including the 2020 Netflix original series *Self Made: Inspired by the Life of Madam C. J. Walker* and Tiffany M. Gill's *Beauty Shop Politics: African American Women's Activism in the Beauty Industry* which present information about African American women's identity in beauty. While such works have a positive impact on beauty culture, they can advance substantially if they are explored from a functional theoretical perspective that centralizes African American women. As scholars and African American beauty salon participants seek to bring matters of identity and rights to the fore, it is important that the subject be approached from a perspective and location that provides agency to the African American women, whom are at the center of such actions. Thus, this exploration employs an Afrocentric theoretical lens, as it is the most auspicious perspective to examine African American women's identity in terms of beauty because it promotes the development of definition(s), identification with, and an overall notion of beauty from an African-centered perspective.

Definitions and determinations of African American women's identity with beauty are determined by experiences including things spoken and unspoken, learned, and seemingly inherent. While there has been a historical lack or misrepresentation of African American women's discursive beauty culture via linguistic and visual discrimination, this work shows that a very autonomous beauty culture has existed amongst African women throughout the world for eons and that culture remains functional via discourse in ubiquitous African American beauty salons.

The celebration of natural hair amongst African Americans in the latter 1960s and its persistence through the 1970s initiated a revolutionary movement that produced a

prototype for collective efforts toward African American liberation, a model that overtly included hair and beauty culture. At the commencement of the twenty-first century there was a resurgence and emphasis on natural hair, makeup, extensions, and hair health. A plethora of do-it-yourself information has emerged in the twenty-first century with sources such as YouTube and Instagram documenting African American women's journeys, skills, and opinions as such exist in reference to beauty culture. Simultaneous to the aforementioned revival and advent, there has been an unprecedented amount of media campaigns utilizing the African beauty culture aesthetic for visual purposes and a quintessential look of inclusion. However, the manner in which African American women wield the agency associated with current media presentations and representations of self is largely not accounted for. From beauty salon commercials to The CROWN Act¹, there are elements of beauty that are being represented and fought for, however they are not presented in manners that reveal the development or use of such a powerful tool of identity formation, which leaves several unanswered questions. While many Black women are happy and proud to see self-reflective images in media along with the legal strides being made in regard to hair, there are several lingering questions that exist because of a failure to give credence to the origin and function of beauty in relation to African American women's knowledge of self. Many postulate "I am Black and beautiful" but how does one know that? Why does one believe that? How will one's

¹ The CROWN Act is representative of a 2019 study conducted by JOY Collective in collaboration with Dove and proposed anti-discrimination legislation. CROWN (Creating a Respectful and Open Workplace for Natural Hair) is spearheaded by the CROWN Coalition to enact a law against natural hair discrimination in occupational and educational spaces in the United States under the statutes of existing employment, housing, and education legislation.

daughters and sisters know that? How will or do African American women get people to honor us as such? How have these women cultivated the prowess, skill, will, and overall agency to assert oneself on such premises? What are the origins for presentations of self through beauty? How do African American women know that there is power in beauty? Why do African American women believe such a thing? As they represent problems in the study of African American women, the aforementioned questions govern and are addressed within the discursive analysis herein.

Drawing upon the use of books/ existing literature, articles, archival records, advertisements, memoirs, and social media, this Afrocentric study considers the tenets of performance studies, popular culture studies, communication studies, institution studies, sociolinguistics, and Womanist studies in the construction of a functional tool for interpretation and expression of African American female identity. The reason identity, representation, and corporeal politics are able to be discussed in reference to African American hair is because discourse has long been an inherent component of Africana beauty culture. Today women talk in physical and virtual beauty salons and Africana women have historically conversed amidst beauty processes in kitchens, on porches, in fields, and in toilette rooms in Kemet. Africana women have been talking and beautifying all along; the conversations beget radical behavior, and that behavior should be recognizable so that Africana women constantly have somewhere to positively see one's self and a firm place of agency to stand.

The clear purpose of this study is to explore the nature of the African American beauty salon as a discursive space (based on human experience) in efforts to propose an Afrocentric method toward liberation that illuminates beauty's function in African

American female identity. This work acts as a refutation of the satirical, minimalistic representations of the African American beauty salon existent in mainstream media which often relegate the discourse in such spaces to mere trite, banal gossip by constantly focusing on aesthetics (as a singular entity), external engagement, and reception. The salon is a sacred long-lasting institution because of the discourse that created it, simultaneously, the sacred nature of the salon is what drives the discourse. By studying the nature of the beauty salon as a discursive space and its impact on African American female identity, this work demonstrates the necessity of and provides a method for, the expression and interpretation of African American female identity through hair.

Need and Timeliness

There is an overtly urgent need for an Afrocentric approach to African American beauty culture. In March of 2020, the first African American First Lady of the United States, Michelle Obama, issued words of empowerment to a 4-year-old girl named Ariyonna via Instagram after the child was shown crying and referring to herself as ugly during a hair grooming session, where her stylist was the first to offer the child words of affirmation and encouragement. Taking to Instagram, Michelle Obama wrote “Ariyonna, you are gorgeous. In a world that sometimes tries to say otherwise, I want to tell you — and every other beautiful, intelligent, brave Black girl — just how precious you are,” these words were followed by similar encouragement from a multitude of African American women, including celebrities. What the beauty shop discourse involving young Ariyonna and her stylist demonstrates is a pervasive issue amongst both African descended girls and women in America- one of a negative, unassured self-image in regard to beauty that often transmutes into mental and physical health issues. What is

also made evident is a phenomenological discourse that transforms African American women daily in spaces of beauty culture. The goal of this research is not to simply shed light on such powerful discourse, but to also suggest, present, and assert a functional method that will allow African women and girls to use the actions, knowledge, and feelings created and expressed in beauty salon discourse as tools to experience self-empowerment and enact communal changes toward freedom and justice for African people in America and abroad.

In congruence with the central issue asserted here, many scholars in the latter twentieth century through the present have critiqued the vast omission and overall treatment of African beauty matters within academia. In “Black Hair Haptics: Touch and Transgressing the Black Body,” Amani Morrison writes “...at the interstices of selfmaking, aesthetic expression, and respectability politics, black hair has been both overdetermined and underexplored as a site of intellectual inquiry” (Morrison 82). Morrison’s assertion speaks to the problem that pervades representation of African women’s hair in American media and the academy. All too often the sources utilized for insight and representation of African American women’s hair comes from distant, limited, elitist perspectives that ignore the everyday experience of African American women and even more frequently, these daily, seemingly regular experiences are not considered or are totally disregarded in academia. In attempts to quantify, qualify, and understand Black women’s identity, hair has long been a topic of discussion – legal, media, and popular culture are just some of the areas where this matter is central- but the topic generally is not dictated by those it affects the most, the ones who beauty talk is most central to- African American women. As the beauty salon is one of the longest

standing institutions in African American history, it is bewildering as to why it is not taken more seriously in academia and explorations of Black women's identity; this is yet another problem that exists in contemporary politics and academia.

Another location where Black beauty culture is put on display is museums. Throughout the world there are historical representations of beauty history in museums that date back to Kemet and various locations including the salon; some examples are the Fitz Williams museum in England, the National African American History Museum, and the Brooklyn Museum. The sarcophagi and reliefs of Kemetite queens, tools used, and advertisements are amongst the types of artifacts on display at many museums. Although public display of artifacts can be regarded as cultural representation, many items of African origin have both artistic and functional purposes. The prohibition of touch for preservation and the housing of items away from the immediate access of its cultural forbearers compromises the functionality of an item. Additionally, the prioritization of capital gain when engaging African cultural items in museums also compromises an item's function. The lack of physical touch, limitation of access for cultural forbearers, and the prioritization of capitalism factor into confusion about: cultural ownership (as exemplified in concerns about who created an item and who houses it); cultural history (regarding details of an item's creation and use); and general notions of misappropriation regarding Africana beauty culture. Issues of misappropriation pervade African history in contemporary time, and the arguments amongst Africans for the recovery of things taken is reflective of a common issue of Eurocentric usurpation. The issue of African museum holdings under the guise of protection and preservation is represented in the case of the Pokomo people from Kenya. As the Pokomo pursue the recovery of their sacred ngadji

drum from the British Museum in London, the common rationale posited by Europeans in illegal possession of the sacred African drum has become quite evident, as exemplified in Max Bearak's "Kenya's Pokomo People ask the British to Return what was Stolen: Their Source of Power" where he writes:

The answer lies in a fierce debate taking place in Western museums, where halls are filled with the richest of plundered lands, over whether institutions that benefitted from colonialism have any right to keep such collections long into the postcolonial era.

To the British Museum and others, even ill-gotten artifacts are now their property. The argument is a legal and utilitarian one: This is where the items are safest and most people will see them.

As narrated by Bearak and many others, there is a constant misappropriation of African cultural material throughout the world, however African people are the rightful bearers and protectors of such items. Thus, it is the hope of this exploration, that Africans can regain possession of cultural artifacts—both material and immaterial— thus, inscribing more value through appreciation and use, therefore having the potential to eradicate any questions of ownership (which is not necessarily an African issue).

Delimitation

Aside from an in-depth historical context that begins with the Kemetic eleventh dynasty, 15th century West Africa, and the Southern United States between the 16th and 19th centuries, this exploration is centrally focused on twentieth century America through the present. Contrary to most popular studies of social, aesthetic, and spiritual matters in twentieth century America and beyond, this work does not focus on notions of modernity in relation to African American identity. While this work recognizes modernity as a Eurocentric concept and does not focus upon it, the pressures of cultural imperialism and modernity are explored herein amidst the analysis of conflicts between African and

European cultural values. Modernity and cultural imperialism are specifically discussed as factors in African struggles for self-claim, continuous strides to assert senses of value, and efforts to develop a culturally centric sense of beauty amongst African women.

Although the notion of modernity is inapt, various inventions and ideas that developed overtime and impacted African American beauty culture are acknowledged or explored herein – i.e., beauty tools, the notion of consumer citizenship, and the commercialized beauty industry.

Although the barbershop is an institutionally parallel phenomenon for African American men, it is not explored in depth in this text which focuses on the beauty salon. With the exception of cursory mention of collaborative efforts between beauty salons and barbershops, unisex salons, and women that have worked as barbers, there is not a focus on discourse associated with barbershops. It is the goal of future research to explore the power of male discourse in barbershops along with intersecting aspects of African male and female beauty culture.

Although Eurocentric notions and Western epistemologies are removed from primacy in this analysis, it is not the goal or focus of this work to dismantle such ideas, as they are applicable to occurrences in which those of European and Western descent are central; thus, this work does not seek to invigorate racist ideas. Conversely, as an Afrocentric work, the magnification of African American women's beauty culture herein may indirectly illuminate non-African beauty concepts which one may find beneficial to inquiry into beauty concepts of non-African cultural groups. In congruence with Ana Montiero-Ferreira's idea that "being a direct critique to every sort of prejudice and racist

theory, Afrocentricity is a theory of wholeness that seeks ways of unity based on mutual respect for the cultural agency of all people....”

this work seeks to promote mutual respect between cultural groups and reveals many means of moving toward a multicultural society by making people subjects in narratives of their own lives (3).

Africana women are not one dimensional and cannot be placed into the strictures of a singular definition of beauty, thus this work does not quarrel with beauty’s definition on Eurocentric terms but rather its function beyond bounds of lexicon, space, or time in the lives of Africana women. The intrinsic elements of Africana female beauty culture that pervade the discourse of today are explored within the guises of their axiological, cosmological, epistemological, and aesthetic values.

Methodology

By looking into beauty salon discourse one can learn about African American female identity formation. An Afrocentric theoretical lens is employed to answer the aforementioned conundrums and simultaneously proselytize a method for expressing and interpreting African American women’s hair and beauty ideals. Afrocentricity is postulated and defined by Molefi K. Asante in *Kemet, Afrocentricity, and Knowledge* as

The Afrocentric study of phenomena, events, ideas, and personalities related to Africa. The mere study of phenomena of Africa is not Africology but some other intellectual enterprise. The scholar who generates research questions based on the centrality of Africa is engaged in a very different research inquiry than the one who imposes Western criteria on the phenomena (Asante 14).

The twentieth and twenty-first century have been filled with vast exposure and changes to matters of beauty in America but a distinct method or model that has Africa at its center, is necessary to continue, extend, and most importantly maintain control over the positive

changes occurring in African American beauty culture. The notions of how and why African American women engage in beauty culture and an approach to understanding the discourse can be realized through Afrocentricity. Because the Afrocentric method includes thematic approaches to discourse, including human relations, human relationships to the supernatural, and human relationships to their own being, when applied to the phenomena of Black beauty culture, the Afrocentric method reveals a great deal about the nature of Black women's identity, one's place in the universe as a Black woman, and spoken and unspoken rules and codes for engagement (Asante 184). Thus, the employment of the Afrocentric method herein exposes the value, execution, and meaning of the Black women's decorum, aesthetics, and interactions within beauty culture; this notion is captured and supported where Ferreira says,

With Afrocentricity we are in the presence of an alternative approach to knowledge that has the methodological and epistemological potential to embrace the domains of ontology, cosmology, ethics, and aesthetics, and a paradigm that entails in its functional framework the functional aspects of African life and experience (163).

While there is currently no model to follow in constructing, interpreting, and evaluating the liberating qualities of African American beauty discourse, a functional theoretical model for such purposes can be comprised after a deep analysis of African women's beauty culture history and the quotidian experience of daily beauty salon talk or *shop talk*. The substance of a revolutionary model for the construction, interpretation, and evaluation of Black beauty culture's agency promoting qualities is elucidated here.

As a theoretical base, Afrocentricity is employed in efforts to explore the previously mentioned discourse in African American women's beauty culture. Asante's idea that "most of our problems are solved through the use of functional concepts" drives the work herein which asserts a functional beauty method for the expression and

interpretation of African American female identity (216). The rationale for this analysis lies in the necessity for Afrocentric knowledge to be functional and the notion that illuminating discursive continuity from a cultural perspective, can allow people to make prompt, productive judgments and decisions within beauty culture (and in future research, other phenomenological areas) that move one further from dislocation and helps to move African communities closer to liberation. Thus, this work shall illuminate things commonly existent in the minds of beauty salon participants in not only a positive light but a wider continuum and context that connects to the African diaspora. The aforesaid task is predicated upon creating epistemological bridges across space and time via analytical recognition and contemporary identification of objects, concepts, beliefs, and occurrences within African American women's beauty culture that function through what Wade Nobles calls collective consciousness. In an article entitled "African Consciousness as Cultural Continuity" featured in *The SAGE Encyclopedia of African Cultural Heritage in North America*, Nobles writes "consciousness at the human level is always a collective experience and passes from one collective generation or one being to the next," thus, the present day African American onlooker may find agency in the resemblance between historical beauty culture and her respective beauty culture experience as practitioner or client. When exploring the salon and beauty culture as a nucleus of knowledge making and observing its vast existence throughout the African diaspora, one can examine, regard, and consider its discourse to be Afrocentric in accordance with Ana Monteiro-Ferreira's postulation that

Afrocentricity is, therefore a theory of knowledge...framed by three conceptual fundamental stances inherent to the African human condition—feeling, knowing, and acting (162).

As feelings, knowledge, and actions are the three principles upon which much African discourse exists, this notion as contextualized by Ferreira is central in describing the epistemological function of beauty salon discourse; knowledge creation via beauty salons and culture; and radical liberating behaviors cultivated in the salon.

In efforts to explore the phenomena of the African American beauty salon and to analyze its liberatory function while maintaining fidelity to the Afrocentric theory and model, this analysis employs Afronography. Afronography is defined by Molefi K.

Asante in the *Encyclopedia of Black Studies* as follows:

...Afronography seeks to determine what it is to know something. There are four approaches used by Afronography: historical, experiential, textual, and social. The aim of these approaches is to engage phenomena in such a way that it becomes possible to determine the location of the agent, creator, operator, or subject... The Afronographer seeks to discover, argue, analyze, prove, challenge, describe, justify, or clarify some situation. This is done within the context of seeking what is true, describing human actions and products, and being respectful of all human situations ... What Afronography allows the researcher to do is to discover in time, place, religion, environment, myths, taboos, customs, habits, and behaviors a measure of what is true, from the standpoint of the African as subject, in a given situation. Ultimately, this is the value of Afronography.

As a third-generation stylist—my maternal grandmother and mother precede me and my elder and younger sisters are my contemporaries—and an experienced senior cosmetologist, my experiences are pertinent to this discursive analysis, as are the perspectives of other Africana women who partake in beauty culture in America. Thus, this Afronographic study includes familial anecdotes that are pertinent to my perspective relating to beauty culture and the salon. This analysis is also supported by a qualitative study that reflects data derived from interviews with other Africana women in America who provide or have provided beauty services and are members of an intergenerational family of beauty practitioners. This intergenerational beauty phenomenon is represented

herein to reveal and support the concept of the African American salon and beauty culture as a discursive space that serves as a hub of agency for African women per its epistemological characteristics. Serie McDougal III's *Research Methods in Africana Studies*, informs the accompanying qualitative study, with specific regard for the definition of profiling, thematic coding options, and the notion of discourse analysis wherein McDougal writes, "Discourse analysis is a research technique that allows you to systematically analyze the hidden and visible content in communication messages (265). While the qualitative study is supplemental to this analysis, the very phenomenon of intergenerational stylists in African American beauty culture are worthy of an extensive textual work all its own, which will be engaged further in later works. Since the Afrocentric method includes human relations, human relationships to the supernatural, and human relationships to their own being as thematic approaches to discourse, and given the lack of sources that explore African American women's beauty culture and salon discourse from an Afrocentric perspective, the Afronographic component of this work gleans insight from another African phenomena that intrigues many people in America—Black music.

There is a profusion of studies both academic and popular-many times blending the traits and audiences of both- that explore Africana, African American, or Black music throughout the world. From the work of Amiri Baraka in *Blues People*, to Nina Simone's autobiography *I Put a Spell on You*, and Angela Davis's *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*, audiences are granted access to life and art of African American music and musicians but there are fewer texts that delve into the mind of the music scholar and musician while simultaneously presenting the nearly intangible, almost unquantifiable

interaction that exists between the Africana listener(s), the musician(s), the music, and the location from an Africana voice. One such text is *Race Music: Black Cultures from Bebop to Hip-Hop* by Guthrie Ramsey. Within the text, Ramsey presents his musical experiences throughout his life with friends and family and employs it as the base for an ethnomusicological analysis of African musical production and impact in America.²

Ramsey's analytical style is relevant to this analysis of beauty culture, the beauty salon, and the discourse therein not only because Black music is connected to Black beauty culture as an art form and music's presence in spaces of beauty culture, but also because of his approach to the relationship and touchpoints existent between Africans in America and music. Although categorized as *ethnomusicology*, Ramsey's work clearly centers African perspectives in his phenomenological exploration, and it reveals a framework for others to do the same, this notion is made evident where he writes:

The experiences shared in this narrative—indeed, a veritable community theater of ideas—depict real people making sense of the world and, in fact, making a world as they went along. But a question is begged: What connections exist between musical discourse and the real-life experiences represented below? I

² The publisher, University of California Press, writes about the book, stating:

Guthrie P. Ramsey, Jr., begins with an absorbing account of his own musical experiences with family and friends on the South Side of Chicago evoking Sunday-morning worship services, family gatherings with food and dancing, and jam sessions at local nightclubs. This lays the foundation for a brilliant discussion of how musical meaning emerges in the private and communal realms of lived experience and how African American music has shaped and reflected identities in the black community. Deeply informed by Ramsey's experience as an accomplished musician, a sophisticated cultural theorist, and an enthusiast brought up in the community he discusses, *Race Music* explores the global influence and popularity of African American music, its social relevance, and key questions regarding its interpretation and criticism

Race Music illustrates how, by transcending the boundaries between genres, black communities bridged generational divides and passed down knowledge of musical forms and styles. It also considers how the discourse of soul music contributed to the vibrant social climate of the Black Power Era (1).

should make clear that I am not interested in drawing one-to-one homologies between a certain recording and the stories told in the interviews I conducted. Such connections are extremely problematic to prove definitively. However, I am suggesting that the sensibilities endowing these cultural memories and musical works possess a tangible coherence and are drawn from the same social and cultural well. In other words, the social energies that circulate in the memories are the same as those that make the music make sense to historically situated actors. At the very least, by putting these discourses into play with one another, we can perhaps speculate an answer to Christopher Small's provocative query: Why are these people listening to this music at this time in this place? (78)

Following the above notion set forth by Ramsey, the discourse narrated and featured herein presents a relationship between African American women and beauty which exemplifies why Black women care to engage in beauty culture and salon spaces beyond aesthetic needs. Through the creation and execution of styles, regardless of one's reason or inspiration, African American women engage in beauty culture and attend salons to make sense of their lives. By changing one's appearance, engaging in dialogue, and providing or receiving services, African American women are engaging in conversation and physical changes that allow us to fit into a world of our own creation and determination—one that some consider *subaltern* and one that others consider *general*—while also allowing us to make a unique impact on the world as each visit to the salon leaves a woman, undoubtedly changed in some facet or another. The idea of the Black beauty salon and beauty culture as *subaltern* is dismissed in this analysis of Black beauty culture because the condescending notion of lowliness or marginality referring to one's culture and cultural phenomena is a representation of Western universalism.

Similar to Ramsey's explanation above, there is no worthy reason for attempting to identify the exact conversation which prompted each Black woman in a beauty salon to select a certain hair style, hence that is not the aim of this discursive study. By

examining hair styles of a given period and considering the historical contextualization of that hair style as associated with women's thoughts and experiences shared through discourse, it becomes apparent that an African American woman's selection of a stylist and a salon are decisive actions. Since the happenstance of hair style selection and hair stylist selection are rare, intentional choices in Africana beauty culture become apparent as well. In the exchange of words, thoughts, sounds, and gestures that typically create Black beauty discourse, hair stylist and client relationships are built; additionally, hair styles are created. As much as hair, nail, and makeup styles impact the experiences in salons and discourse, the salon and discourse reciprocally impact the styles. Reminiscent to the sentiments of Guthrie, the trends and reflections of heightened consciousness represented through hair style selection and the discourse that occurs in beauty spaces are "drawn from the same cultural well" (78). Through the incorporation of my experiences as a member of a family of beauty practitioners throughout this analysis and the conclusive inclusion of perspectives of other beauty service providers who hail from intergenerational beauty families such as myself, the experiences of African women in beauty salons and beauty culture in America are given life and context. A great deal can be revealed about the epistemology and sacred nature of Black beauty salons and beauty culture when textual sources are enlivened by the inclusion of Africana perspectives of women who have lived beauty culture, provided service to other women who have lived beauty culture, and hail from the lineage of others who have done the same.

This study of Africana beauty discourse advances chronologically and geographically, proceeding from approximately 2000 BC in Kemet, to approximately 15th century West Africa, and ending with an emphasis on America year 1900 through 2021

but utilizing the historical discourse of Africa as a constant reference. Various Afrocentric theoretical perspectives and methodologies are used to explore discursive phenomena associated with hair politics of African women in America during the mid-20th century through present day. Institutional entities like the salon, the kitchen, hair shows, and beauty schools are examined as spaces where both physical and metaphysical changes occur. Iconographic hair styles, including straightened hair, braided styles, locs, bushes/afros, and permanent waves are explored in reference to the conversations and radical actions associated with each. Several protests are also explored in as some of the most overt evidence of beauty culture discourse.

Theoretical Basis

The rhetorical condition of the African female physical body throughout history displays a narrative themed by violence, triumph, abuse, strength, and a myriad of both positively and negatively connoted concepts. In many works that explore the African female body in America, the focus is on that which has come to jeopardize, endanger, and ultimately harm African women. Such focus on hegemony over the African female body in America is often factual, however, dwelling in such facts centers the African female body as object as opposed to subject. Such objectification has the potential to drastically reduce agency associated with the triumphant, victorious legacy and conscience of African women in America. Thus, any attempt to engage African women in agency production, such as that herein, must seek to shift the rhetorical condition of such women by disrupting the prescribed categories of rhetoric. According to Asante:

...the oppressed, nonfree people, who are enjoined, are challenged to struggle against a structural discourse that denies their right to freedom and, indeed, their right to existence. Ultimately, the acting out or the speaking out of the word is also

confined to the categories established by the early power brokers for the dominant society. That is why I speak of the empowering of the oppressed by listening to their voices (28).

Along with the conundrum of rhetorical categories, this quote also provokes the question of what would happen if people listened to the ways in which African women in America have struggled against the structure of Eurocentric discourse by not only using their voices but also their bodies, specifically their hair, in exertions of agency.

Afrocentricity is employed as a theoretical framework within this study to examine the impact of discourse in moments of female grooming and consciously constructed spaces where such actions occur and are celebrated. As Afrocentricity undergirds many of the selected secondary sources and the general approach to the matter herein, several confounding works written by the creator of Afrocentricity, Molefi K. Asante are cited, including *Afrocentricity: The Theory of Social Change; Kemet, Afrocentricity, and Knowledge; The Afrocentric Idea; and The Afrocentric Manifesto*. In conjunction with the aforementioned works, various texts that ascribe to or engage Afrocentric methodology are employed, including Ana Monteiro-Ferreira's *The Demise of the Inhuman*³ and Ruth Reviere's "The Canons of Afrocentric Research."

Methods

The five canons of Afrocentric research as posed by Ruth Reviere are employed within the research herein. The rationale for the selection of the 5 canons as a tool lies in the fact that Reviere "argues for new research orientations and provides new yardsticks

³ Aspects of Ana Monteiro-Ferreira's significant Afrocentric text are used to explain the epistemology that exists in the African American beauty salon and to narrate the cognitive shift that shall occur amongst African women in America when this study demonstrates the importance of the salon as a discursive space.

(in the form of five Afrocentric research canons) by which research would be better judged” (1). Reviere’s cannons support the creation of a study of African American phenomena that centers African cultural perspectives and one that does not privilege European hegemony because of Reviere’s theoretical focus on the linearity of objectivity, reliability, and validity. Accordingly, the data received via this discursive analysis, is weighed with consideration of Reveire’s tools of measurement (1). The discourse of the salon is explored as an epistemological tool for learning; the knowledge construction and methods therein are discussed in relation to the creation of identity and the physical, spiritual, and mental wellbeing of African American female participants. As I identify with the community researched in the study, I also insert myself into the research and rationale for this discursive analysis, which reflects Reviere’s idea that

...the personal and the theoretical are inseparable, the researcher is, in fact, compelling the reader to search for the layers of subtexts beyond what has actually been revealed, to come to a more complete understanding of the meaning of the data presented (1).

By inserting myself into the research, it is my hope that readers use this text and tool to make new meanings surrounding beauty culture. My fervor toward beauty culture, life as a third-generation stylist, and experience as a senior cosmetologist informs this study because subjectivity does not need to be removed- for doing so would disrupt the power of the method herein and contradict the Afrocentric method. With the understanding that Ma’at and justice are at the core of Afrocentricity, this work proceeds as a “...research exercise itself, in harmony with the researcher, being used as a tool in the pursuit of truth and justice” (Reviere 1). In efforts to improve the existence of African American women internally and in subsequent intercultural dealings, this work shall make use of Nommo,

which Reviere describes as “Nommo means ‘the productive word,’ and here it describes the creation of knowledge as a vehicle for improvement in human relations” (1).

All aspects of the research conducted within this study, the resulting findings, and the methodology exposed herein are evaluated in terms of the canons of Afrocentric research espoused by Reviere: *ukweli*, *kujittoa*, *utulivu*, *ujamaa*, and *uhaki*. *Ukweli*, the first of the Afrocentric research canons, is defined as “the grounded-ness of research in the experiences of the community being researched”; in congruence with this tenet, I let the interest of the community of African women I am serving guide me, and I know I come in favor and bias toward the agency and happiness of this cohort of people.

Kujittoa is the second canon and requires that the researcher “emphasize considerations of how knowledge is structured and used over the need for dispassion and objectivity”; the epistemological aspects of this study, as they traverse the etymology of Kemetic, West African, American, and contemporary terms widely used in African American beauty culture, demonstrate the construction and function of knowledge and identity. My work seeks to ameliorate internal difference by focusing on the discourse of beauty culture and concentrating less on the corporeal differences of texture, color, length, style, product, or stylist selection; this upholds the third canon *utulivu*, which

requires that the researcher actively avoid creating, exaggerating, or sustaining divisions between or within communities but rather strive to create harmonious relationships between and within these groups (Reviere 1).

In efforts to uphold the fourth canon *ujamaa*, this work herein is totally inspired and “informed by the actual and aspired interests of the community” which is demonstrated in the historical context and various textual examples that reflect a desire amongst Africana women for people to understand the role and power of beauty culture in the lives of the aforesaid women; as I am part of the African American female beauty culture as both

practitioner and client, there is no “researcher-participant separation” (Reviere 1). The fifth and final canon, *uhaki*, denotes harmony, and in compliance with such, this research seeks to uphold harmony between the various groups of Africana women whose perspectives, experiences, and choices are engaged herein. By employing the five canons of Afrocentric research, this study is compliant with the theory of Afrocentricity and functions toward the victory of Africana women.

This work employs the aforementioned methodological approach in efforts to shift the current rhetorical condition in which African American women’s identity is discussed, thus further ascribing agency and political value to African women’s hair as a significant source of information on rhetorical resistance and a tool for victory. The task and methodological approach in this analysis is both speculative, in figuring at some early discourse, and empirical as there is an overt inclusion of my professional credentials and personal experiences. The aforementioned notion of the speculative methodology as it is used in this analysis, is supported by Denise Martin in “Maat and Order in African Cosmology: A Conceptual Tool for Understanding Indigenous Knowledge”. Ma’at was the governing principle of life in Kemet and its elements of truth, justice, propriety, harmony, balance, reciprocity, and order appear throughout the African diaspora and the world per various non-African group’s engagements with African people, culture, and phenomena throughout history. Denise Martin is one of many scholars who have explored that meaning and application of Ma’at, and her work draws upon that of Afrocentric scholars such as Maulana Karenga. In *Maat and Order in African Cosmology: A Conceptual Tool for Understanding Indigenous Knowledge* Martin discusses the application of Ma’at as an analytical tool; she states:

...space has been created for this type of speculative discourse about broader patterns in African culture. However, it must be acknowledged that when applying a concept across space and time, there is the hermeneutical “tension between ‘reading’ into and ‘drawing’ out of” (Karenga, 2004, p. 26). In response, if one consciously maintains that it is a speculative application and, more important, avoids the notion of an ideal, this approach can be intellectually enriching. Maat is not positioned as “an ideal” or “the ideal” for discussing African sacred knowledge. Similarly, it is not a standard, therefore determining which African cultures have a concept similar to Ma’at and which do not is not the thrust of this work. It is a paradigm, a framework with which to consider how this knowledge is reflected in cultural production (954).

In this work, where speculation and synthesis of information (under the guises of continuity) are methodologically central, an ideal is not being suggested but rather a lens for interpretation, understanding, and the formation of African American women’s identity. The hope of this project of recovery is that African women in America can begin or continue to invent institutions that produce agency and are created from the substance of African culture and heritage which will curtail mental dislocation.

The chapters of this work reflect an analysis of Africana women’s responses to oppressive forces through beauty culture and salons at specific points of heightened political consciousness. Ana Monteiro-Ferreira’s *The Demise of the Inhuman* is centrally employed in interpretations of the knowledge in each era’s beauty discourse because Ferreira’s text not only reveals means for overturning inhumanity, but it also emphasizes the epistemological capabilities in Asante’s Afrocentric method, thus allowing people to do just that—overturn inhumanity—by upending such ideas in regard to African people. This work is a project that emanates from that overturning nature, in its focus on discourse to invigorate the liberatory aspect of African women’s identity in the realm of beauty culture. The propensity of Afrocentricity to reflect why Africana women in America have a unique and significant relationship to the salon and beauty culture and

how discourse represents and functions in that attachment across time and space, is captured where Ferreira writes of Afrocentricity,

It has become the frame of reference when we want to understand, and overturn, the deep structure of power relations that have almost erased colonized peoples' agency out of the world landscape; when we look for a paradigm that provides the epistemological tools to scientifically address issues of oppression, marginalization, and dislocation; when we as scholars are committed to social change, liberation, and the advancement of knowledge to that effect; when we look for the most coherent humanistic philosophy and hermeneutics of the present day; when we seek to correct history (165).

A primary function of Ferreira's work as she states it, is to "reaffirm the strengths and vitality of a radical counterhegemonic theory in the preservation of the collective and diverse human values and knowledges, and use its epistemology and praxis to confront imperialistic power and epistemological colonialism and false universalisms" (xiv). As Asante writes in the forward of Ferreira's work,

...she promotes in this book an antiracist and antisexist position in regard to any particularism announcing itself as universal. I see a number of advantages to the reader in this type of work. It allows the general reader to appreciate that you can view phenomena from different viewpoints, and therefore the relocation of the historic subject is a key aspect of launching this analysis. Furthermore, since the philosophy of Afrocentricity, like all philosophies, is a response to context and circumstances, the experiences of oppression, distortion, disorientation, and annihilation, as indicated by Ferreira, are the cornerstones of a new way of seeing phenomena (xi).

The review of oppressive elements within a given era that frames each chapter of this analysis, is given more rationale. As he introduces Ferreira's work, Asante not only locates the text within the theoretical bounds of the Afrocentric method being employed within this discursive analysis, he also emphasizes the need for relocation and the responsive aspect of the Afrocentric philosophy to experiences of oppression and the like. This work aligns with Asante's endorsement of Ferreira, as each chapter discusses remarkable oppressive forces in a given era and how discursive expressions in and of the salon (albeit terms, styles, ideas, community activities/ initiatives, etc.) radically

combated oppression, thus aiding in and reflecting a collective and often heightened consciousness amongst Africans in America through beauty culture discourse.

Terminology/Vocabulary

As this work joins several other works of African American beauty scholarship, it complements existing dialogue by providing a foundational basis steeped in African beauty history and the root of all discussion –Nommo- while functioning from a vantage point that explicitly reflects the community of focus- Africana women.

There is continuity amongst women throughout the African diaspora in reference to the notion of the beauty salon and beauty culture existing as sacred phenomena across time and space. The continuity that exists can be traced through an examination of the language surrounding sacred beauty practices among women of African diaspora. Thus, the historical context and terminology of this work reveal the development of sacredness as associated with beauty culture among African American women by examining such notions throughout the African diaspora via an etymological and practical analysis. As the origin of words and practical analysis of terms within beauty culture are explored, many terms within this study are metonymical. As the research presents terms or figures of speech that represent a larger concept or an attribute of something, such as crown standing in for hair, those metonyms are defined. As the study chronologically and spatially moves from Kemet, to West Africa, to America, metonymy is also used to account for differences in style names amongst African populations; the terms cornrow and cane row⁴ are one example. The difference in terminology but similarity in actual

⁴ There are several terms that are slightly different throughout African diasporic beauty culture but refer to the same thing. One such difference is that of cornrows and cane

items, procedures, tools, and styles represent how continuity in Africana identity is connected in terms of hair, skin, and nails.

Various terms are used to refer to people of African descent. *Africana* is used in efforts to refer to the African diaspora and women therein. *African American* is employed to refer to people of African descent born or residing in the United States of America; *Black* is also used to refer to the aforesaid population. The word combination *African people* refers to people from the continent or those of the diaspora residing in a respective landmass, which is named after the two aforementioned terms. *Beauty culture* and *hair culture* are used as referents to the activity, spaces, places, dialogue, paradigm and participants involved in matters regarding the aesthetics and health of hair, skin, and nails. Various proper nouns are used to specify a group of people when using *beauty culture* and *hair culture* (i.e., *Black women's beauty culture*, *Africana beauty culture*, *Kemetic beauty culture*, etc.). The Black beauty salon exists in and is a product of Black women's beauty culture, in a circular nature, Black beauty culture exists in and is a byproduct of the Black beauty salon; thus, the terms Black beauty culture and the Black beauty salon are frequently mentioned together in this analysis⁵.

rows which historically refer to the lives – and in this case work- of African people. In Bridget Boakye's "How Cornrows Were Used as an Escape Map from Slavery Across South America", she explains the basis of this difference where she writes, "In the Caribbean, the style may be referred to as cane rows to represent "slaves planting sugar cane", and not corn" (Boakye).

⁵ This reciprocal phenomena of the beauty salon and beauty culture having an interdependent relationship can be observed throughout Africana history, so connections are drawn herein between African women across space and time; however, this discursive analysis gives specific attention to the beauty culture of African women in America/ African American women/ Black women who have made a variety of strides against oppression via beauty culture and the epistemology fostered therein. This

As this study proceeds chronologically, beauty terms popular in Kemet approximately 2000 BCE, approximately 15th century West Africa, and those popularized in America beginning in the early twentieth century are also defined and employed throughout this study. As Africana women's beauty interactions in physical spaces are discussed, with an emphasis on salons, porches or stoops, restrooms, and kitchens, the terminology in this discursive analysis also includes discussions of speech pattern, moans and groans, rules of dialogue, and other non-lexical discursive content which has great relevance and insurmountable occurrences in such physical spaces of beauty engagement occupied by Africans. As many language or linguistic texts are engaged in this analysis, terms like *mother tongue* are applied and cited herein, both as an ode to the focus on women and a reflection of existing discourse regarding African American women's identity and language.⁶ Many language, beauty, and Africana cultural terms are defined and used throughout this study to explore the nature of discourse that fills African American beauty salons on a daily basis.

Review of Literature

Although this exploration is guided by various Afrocentric perspectives, including theories which focus on the agency of African women, such as Womanism, Africana Womanism, and Black Feminism, this exploration is not intended to be a distinction of the schools of such thought. As opposed to a theory evaluation in effort to conclude

interdependence is given further rationale in Chapter 3 which discusses the role and function of Ma'at in Africana beauty culture, life, and phenomena.

⁶ Although the term *mother tongue* is widely used as a referent to maternal language, it is uniquely cited here in relationship with Africana language, personalities, and phenomena per literature that fits into the category of African American Women's Language.

which theory is most conducive to the formation of agency for African women in America, this text makes use of each of the previously cited ideologies in a hybrid manner within the examination of the rhetorical resistance that existed via beauty salon discourse in Kemet, West Africa, and America within the latter twentieth century through the present. This exploration does not generate a chronology of African female hair in America or body politics for African women in America, however, sources of that sort inform this work. This exploration focuses on beauty salon discourse as a rhetorical tool for resistance as used by the aforesaid population.

Although this work is unique as one of the foremost Africological beauty studies, there are several works that inform this exploration which emanate from explorations of Africa, Africana women, Black women's beauty culture, African American language, and African American art. As the study will explore communities of African women, Lewis Gordon's *Introduction to African Philosophy* is cited for its overview of African philosophical thought, and more specifically African female thought. When discussing Womanism Gordon writes:

[Alice Walker] argued that part of black women's fight against oppression is to assert themselves as women. By this, she meant that the racial and sexual subordination of black women designated them as children, making assertion of their adult status a form of transgression – what in the vernacular is known as being “uppity” or “womanish” when referring to black girls. Walker transformed this term into “womanist” and “womanism,” calling for women of color to center each other in their lives (102).

While this quote provides a history of Womanism it is relevant to this exploration because it illustrates the idea that whenever an African woman violates norms of the American society, even in the form of hair, her body and being are readily associated with a political violation or a form of transgression. Thus, it is important that the African

female body, in all of its assertions, specifically hair in this context, be recognized and centralized in examinations of African female agency and identity formation.

As previously stated, several Afrocentric theories are to be employed within this exploration. Molefi K. Asante's ideas about rhetoric of resistance and the conceptual field of rhetoric are the guiding principles of this exploration and attempt to legitimize African beauty culture and the salon in America as a site of rhetorical resistance. The institutional entities, iconographic hair styles, and moments of protest cited within this work are evaluated based upon Anna Julia Cooper's philosophical notion of value. As Cooper's work provided the basis for many of the African Womanist and African Feminist theories in existence today-which are often the means for exploring and asserting African female agency-her foundational theory is exceedingly appropriate to this exploration of African female agency and discourse. In her seminal work *A Voice from the South*, Cooper discusses her theory of worth and efficacy which challenged notions of race, gender, productivity, and worth pertaining to African women in America; Lewis Gordon summarizes Cooper's philosophy where he writes:

Cooper's response was that worth was a function of what an individual produced in relation to that which was invested in him or her. She pointed out that very little was invested in blacks, and even less in black women. Yet what blacks have produced is enormous. There is not only the slave labor used to build much of the Americas, but also the innovations and strides of black communities under enormously handicapped conditions...This argument, from her essay "What Are We Worth?" enabled her to advance the importance of a black feminist agenda through the claim that, internal to black communities, much more was invested in black men than black women, but that black women produced more in relation to such investments than did black men because of being laborers who also bore children. In effect, she formulated an efficiency theory of human worth (72).

Cooper's line of thinking was groundbreaking, in that it permitted a perspective through which one could see the value in African female production while also asserting that African women had worth.

As this text seeks to illuminate the rhetorical prowess of African American women through expressions associated with beauty culture, the theories, terms, and ideas employed here explore and expand the radical imagination of Africans (or the radical Black imagination) which Robin D.G. Kelly describes in *Freedom Dreams* as a

...collective imagination engaged in the actual movement for liberation. It is fundamentally a product of struggle, victories and losses, crisis and opening, and endless conversations circulating in a shared environment (150).

Through the exploration herein, the radical imagination of Africana women is explored and hopefully expanded within this analysis, as beauty culture and the salon are interrogated as sites for rhetorical resistance.

Since this work is chronological in order, there are a variety of sources that provide the basis for beauty culture and salon discourse examples in Kemet approximately 2000 BC, approximately 15th century West Africa, and 20th through 21st century America. In the exploration of Kemet and West Africa, the following works have been consulted: Cheikh Anta Diop's *The African Origin of Civilization*, Ama Mazama's *The Afrocentric Paradigm*, *Black Women in Antiquity* by Ivan Van Sertima, *Exploring Religion in Ancient Egypt* by Stephen Quirke, *Libation* by Kimani Nehusi, *The Last Queens of Egypt: Cleopatra's Royal House* by Sally-Ann Ashton, Sally-Ann Ashton's "Ancient Egyptian Hair-Combs" exhibit in the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, England, *Eloquence of the Scribes: A Memoir on the Sources and Resources of African Literature* by Kwei Armah, Maulana Karenga's *Maat, Mistress of the House*,

Mistress of Heaven: Women in Ancient Egypt by Anne K. Capel, *The Moral Idea in Ancient Egypt*, Ian Shaw's *The British Museum Dictionary of Ancient Egypt*, and various encyclopedias and dictionaries of Egypt and Africa. In explorations of African American beauty culture and African American salons various texts will be explored including Tiffany M. Gill's *Beauty Shop Politics: African American Women's Activism in the Beauty Industry*, Tanisha C. Ford's *Liberated Threads*, Ingrid Banks *Hair Matters: Beauty Culture and Black Women's Consciousness*, Althea Prince's *The Politics of Black Women's Hair*, Juliette Harris and Pamela Johnson's *Tenderheaded: A Comb- Bending Collection of Hair Stories*, Obiagele Lake's *Blue Veins and Kinky Hair: Naming and Color Consciousness in African America*, Noliwe Rooks's *Hair Raising: Beauty, Culture, and African American Women*, several works by Lanita Jacobs Huey including "Negotiating Price in an African American Beauty Salon", amongst others. The literature mentioned herein is not an exhaustive list of all that is cited within this work, but instead a reflection of qualitative works that have been consulted for insight and examples of Africana beauty discourse.

Breakdown of Chapters

The chapters that comprise this study are ordered chronologically and geographically exploring three epochs with an emphasis on the latter: Kemet approximately 2000 BC, approximately 15th century West Africa, and 20th through 21st century America. The discourse associated with the 11th dynasty of Kemet and beauty salons in 2021 serve as the opening and closing focal areas of this study. After a geographical study of beauty culture from 2000 Kemet to 15th century West Africa, the periods investigated in this analysis are based in America and the study will be broken

down into the following year increments based upon periods of beauty culture: 1900-1950, 1960-1980, 1990-2000, and 2000-2021. Within each specified period institutional entities like the salon, the kitchen, hair shows, and beauty schools are examined along with the discourse therein, including discursive content surrounding iconographic hair styles, litigation, and advertisements. Each chapter also mentions an Afronographic connection from myself as an African American woman, third-generation stylist, and member of the Black beauty culture community whose discourse is analyzed herein in efforts to maintain the five canons of Afrocentric research. As this work chronologically proceeds, the oppressive force(s) associated with the eras in each chapter are also analyzed critically in efforts to support the overturning of inhumanity through Afrocentric theory and methodology. Popular styles that existed amongst African women are also discussed in each chapter in efforts to explore and analyze the ways in which hair functions as text in the larger Black beauty salon and culture discourse. Existing literature, articles, archival records, advertisements, and memoirs produced in or focusing on the aforementioned time frames, are examined as qualitative text, with special attention to the space of the salon, social activism, and styles of discourse that reflect that which can be observed in African American beauty salons. When the study reaches the year 2020, the increment-based analysis ends, and the last chapter of this study consists of a summary of all that has preceded it. A thematic presentation of qualitative data from the intergenerational beauty culture study that accompanies this analysis, recommendations for the future of the African America beauty salon, and associated studies of African American female identity conclude this work.

The first chapter of this study consists of an overview of the subject matter, terminology, a literature review discussing significant secondary sources that inform this exploration, and the methodologies that guide the discourse analysis. The second chapter provides a portion of the study's historical context via a general *hairstory* or hair history of African women in America, illuminating location, mythology, economic development, and social development. The third chapter provides historical context and an Afrocentric theoretical anchor, as it focuses on Kemet and its impact on etymology of Africana beauty culture and discourse. The fourth chapter employs notions of cultural continuity to discuss the relationship and retentions evident between Kemet, West Africa, and the United States as transmission of beauty discourse was impacted by the Maafa and enslavement. Early 20th century discursive developments in African American beauty culture, the beauty salon, and the impact therein on African American women's identity is the focus of chapter five. Chapters six, seven, and eight, respective to time (1960-1980, 1990-2000, and 2000-2020) discusses the developments in beauty salon structure, the nature of discourse therein, and the reciprocal relationships between national politics, popular culture, and beauty culture. The ninth, and final chapter of this study restates the assertions of the chapters that precede it by incorporating the findings therein into a discussion of the qualitative study that was conducted as a supplement to this analysis. The qualitative data was derived from an intergenerational beauty culture study. The conclusive chapter of this work clearly delineates the potential methodology revealed through this exploration which functions as a method that can be employed to reveal the function of beauty in African American female identity and efforts toward liberation that rhetorically resists inhumanity.

Conclusion

A rhetoric of resistance is currently thriving in beauty culture through salon discourse and physical bodies of African women in America, however, this representation is no result of happenstance; it is of a much longer continuum that African women should be aware of. This represents the ways in which the aforesaid rhetoric of resistance has been and can be used to create agency for African women of the 21st century.

Many African American women attest to know what the African American beauty salon is and what occurs in such spaces. Often times the African American beauty salon is simply associated with beautification, conversation, and several other things that are deemed baseless along with matters that are relegated to mere aesthetics. While such ignorance and relegation is problematic in relation to developing and understanding the agency of African American women, there is much to be known about the discursive epistemology and intrinsic value laden within African American beauty culture and the origins therein which are sacredly cultivated and maintained in the African American beauty salon. Thus, this work presents an analysis that explores what it means to know African American beauty culture through the sacred nature of the beauty salon and its characteristics represented through discourse, while simultaneously establishing a functional methodology that allows researchers, beauty culturists, and all humans alike to understand and further cultivate the sacred relationship between African American women and beauty culture. In alignment with Afrocentric theory, this work presents African ideals and values as a frame of reference for both daily activities and academic inquiry relating to the beauty and overall identity of African women in America.

CHAPTER 2: SPLITTING HAIRS: A CONTEXTUALIZATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN HAIR AND SALONS IN THE UNITED STATES AT PRESENT (2020-2021 AND THE PANDEMIC)

On January 21st, 2020 the United States publicly confirmed its first case of the COVID-19, coronavirus disease after news began to spread of mysterious illness in China in the last month of 2019. In September of 2020, the House of Representatives passed The CROWN Act after a great deal of state government attempts and nearly a year after the New Jersey, Senator Corey Booker, introduced The CROWN Act federally on December 5th, 2019⁷. As the first act to ban natural hair discrimination in the United States picked up steam in state and federal court rooms, the legal matter and treatment of culturally African hair styles in America was a site of contention for many, in conjunction with the other oppressive forces that narrated the year 2020. Aside from woes of a pandemic and the reality of only seven out of 50 states in the U.S. enacting The CROWN Act, other subjugating forces themed the year, including, an antagonistic presidential regime, a reinvigorated white supremacy ideology actions, leftist extremism, domestic terrorism, continuous police abuse and murder of Black people, lack of justice for illegal treatment of Black lives, unfair treatment of Black protesters amidst legal protests, along with international justice and environment issues impacting Africans throughout the diaspora. At present African American women's hair and beauty culture are being treated dichotomously; in the United States there is an almost contradictory narrative wherein hair and beauty culture are everything upon which society judges

⁷ The April 2020 article, "Is Hair Discrimination Race Discrimination?" from D. Sharmin Arfin chronicles the legal struggles and process of The CROWN Act.

African women in America, yet Black hair and beauty culture are said to have no political value to the society. The viewpoints regarding this contradictory situation are manifest in the continuous battle to end hair discrimination via The CROWN Act and the perspectives shared by many Black women when asked about their selected hair styles.

According to Althea Prince in *The Politics of Black Women's Hair*,

For many Black women, hair is just hair, and the choices they make are connected to convenience and ease—not to their politics or sexual preference. Nonetheless, they can still be judged with a social or political interpretation of who they are, based solely on their hair style. Clearly, Black women do not all think alike, nor do they make choices for the same reasons. There may be a large divergence in the significance of a particular hair style among Black women (16).

The significance and variation that Prince discusses in regard to hair style is not only represented in style selection, but also beauty culture and salon engagement.

The crisis, violence, and loss, that marked 2020 did not leave the African American beauty salon unscathed. As a physical space that has been one of safety and rejuvenation for Black women for well over a century, the pandemic ironically threatened the salon and simultaneously magnified its importance. This ironic situation of threat and celebration was brought to the fore as salons were forced limit capacity or cease operations throughout most of the United States beginning in March of 2020. As a reflection of feeling loss and lost without the salon, many African American women engaged in public lamentation within the virtual salon of social media and the blogosphere along with content captured in periodicals. As hashtags including, *I miss my stylist* and *I miss the salon* pervaded social media, several articles also emerged revealing sadness or inconvenience in regard to missing salons and stylists. In an article entitled “How 9 Black Women Are Taking Care of Their Hair in Quarantine” for *Elle Magazine*, Chole Hall interviews nine women and shares some of her own thoughts about the salon

and beauty culture amidst the pandemic. Before including interviews of the nine women, Chloe Hall writes, “I’ve never had to do my own hair before, but the pandemic has forced me to tirelessly learn how to install twists without the help of a stylist, who has the touch that I just don’t possess” (Hall). Five of Hall’s interviewees, who hail from various cities and backgrounds, echoed similar sentiments about being glad they visited the salon prior to the shutdown or expressed some measure of sadness or frustration at having to style one’s own hair. In an article entitled “How Black Women are Creating Good Hair Days During Pandemic,” Maya Golden Bethany writes,

[O]n April 2, Gov. Gregg Abbott announced the closing of hair salons and barbershops. I found myself with a dilemma, not just for a story but for my own hair. My natural hair was braided under a sew-in protective style, a weave, to reduce the stress on my strands that can come with constant styling. When the stay-at-home order came down and salons closed, I did not consider the scope and implications to their full extent. I was wearing a weave, everything was fine. Until that moment when it was not. Tangled, disheveled and clinging on [*sic*]to the hope of extending its wear, I finally accepted that I had to cut it two weeks later... While it would be easy to lament the process, I do still have hair. My stylists [*sic*] and the salon where she [*sic*] works, however, do not still have a steady income.

Within her personal anecdote in the article’s introduction, Bethany, captures what occurred for many African American women who held onto or adopted protective styles during the stages of quarantine and lockdown.

Reciprocally, practitioners expressed lamentation through the hashtag *I miss my clients* and a host of conversations about life outside of the salon and service provision. In an *ABC News* article, entitled “African Americans in the Hair Industry Say COVID-19 Social Distancing is Crushing Them” Olivia Eubanks, quotes interviewees who are industry professionals where she writes, “Whitney Spencer, owner of Crown Salon Studio in Little Rock, Arkansas, said the process of applying for loans and unemployment is ‘confusing, slow and unreliable’... ‘This pandemic is crippling to us

African American stylists who were built to hustle’ she said.” Eubanks also includes words from stylists who she describes as trying to remain optimistic, where she writes, “‘I would love to see people transitioning back into the salon,’ Shaleea Womack said. Womack, 52, owner of Head Over Heels by Shaleea in New Jersey is preparing for the changes that will come once her salon opens back up. ‘Clients can expect major sanitary procedures we learned in cosmetology school to be the 2.0 version on steroids,’ she said” (Eubanks). Expressions of sadness have not been the only response to salon closings during the pandemic. In Chloe Hall’s article four interviewees did not lament the salon, many reported not visiting the salon before COVID-19 quarantine and lockdown procedures in their living areas or reported having completed their own hair grooming before COVID-19 pandemic restrictions began. As such articles enter beauty culture discourse in addition to other headlines like “Black Women Are Reclaiming Their Identity Through ‘Covid Cuts,’” wherein author Afrobella writes of the pandemic era

But what does a big chop signify in times like these when life has shifted? For months now I’ve been observing my salon-dependent friends go through the pandemic, sharing their hair and beauty struggles online. Some have leaned into the times and learned to do their own braids or twists through online tutorials. Many have chosen to just big chop and rock a teeny weenie Afro instead. (Afrobella) The display of comments from Black women about beauty and beauty salons represent a sort of bifurcation regarding beauty culture and salon regard. The divergence in current salon and beauty culture regard are exemplified where Chloe Hall writes,

Black Girl Church, a documentary about black women and their relationships to beauty supply stores and the salon experience, treats the experience as a near-religious ceremony and a sanctuary for one of the most marginalized communities. And in late 2016, #BlackSalonProblems began trending on Twitter as women shared their horror stories, which mostly followed the same plot. (Hall) Hall’s words vividly reveal that the salon and beauty culture are simultaneously in a state of threat and celebration that characterizes current beauty culture discourse. When *utilivu*

is applied to the rhetoric of this discursive dichotomy, the divisive elements of the structural environment become trivial because regardless of one's position, the salon and beauty culture are still central even in an environment where the physical space(s) is compromised. In this unique application of Afrocentric methods, differences and division in opinions become secondary to the larger matter worth celebrating, which is that beauty culture and the salon have a continuous history of educating African women about matters of self-knowledge and identity via hair and beauty culture. However, present day entertainment, governmental, and occupational spaces frequently generate counternarratives.

As African American women continue to wear the popular styles of the present day that were in motion before and during the pandemic, including various natural styles (twist outs, roller sets, and wet-and-go based styles), relaxed and thermally straightened styles, various braids of both cornrow and individual structure, short haircuts achieved with natural hair or wig and weave extensions, long lengths accomplished by one's natural hair or by adding extensions including sewn-in weaves and wigs. When engaged as text, each of the aforementioned styles can be read as communicative symbols that reverberate cultural celebration, cultural continuity, consideration of one's lifestyle (by choosing low maintenance and long-lasting hair styles), creative expression, and community engagement through hair styles that often require the help of another person to achieve the desire style. When salons reopened throughout the United States in the summer of 2020, Black women were able to return to the space that not only cultivates the styles mentioned above, thus satisfying a physical desire, but also one that provides a myriad of needs in the metaphysical realm of mental and spiritual healing. In the time of

despair and reevaluation of the beauty salon and beauty culture that emerged in the pandemic discourse, many including myself, were able to contemplate the current state and context of Black beauty salons and culture. Such contemplation revealed the need to truly split hairs⁸ in current discursively captured considerations of the salon in the context of Black women's knowledge; the aforesaid examination of the salon brings forth the questions: What are African American women currently teaching others and learning about ourselves within beauty culture? How is that epistemology creating agency for Black women in 2021?

As a member of an intergenerational family of beauty service providers, the salon has been a constant component of my life for as long as I can remember. However, between the constraints of a pandemic and other elements including those mentioned above, the salon's function in my life has dwindled as my ability to provide services to clients was impacted during the pandemic, like the fate of other practitioners. Although beauty service may seem insignificant to many during a pandemic, the Black beauty salon's significance emerged as a motif in the shop talk⁹ that occurred among myself, my

⁸ According to The American Heritage Idioms Dictionary website, the act of splitting hairs is "To argue about an inconsequential and trivial aspect of an issue..." or to "Make trivial distinctions, quibble...This metaphoric idiom transfers dividing so fine an object as a single hair to other petty divisions [Second half of 1600s]".

⁹ Shop talk is often themed by gossip as captured by Blain Roberts in *Pageants, Parlors, and Pretty Women: Race and Beauty in the Twentieth-Century South* (101). Gossip is put into concert with a myriad of important elements that appear in beauty shop talk, where the National Museum of African American History and Culture asserts, "They have been places not only to get hair care services but locations where black people could be vulnerable and talk about issues of importance in the community. There were spaces where customers played games such as chess, cards, and dominoes, while having conversations about local gossip, politics, and community affairs" in a section and webpage entitled The Community Roles of the Barber Shop and Beauty Salon.

family members involved in the beauty industry, and the few clients I have serviced during the pandemic. The larger American society deems the beauty salon and matters of beauty culture as insignificant, yet it is highly used and commodified in popular culture without consideration of its role in the quotidian experiences of Africans in America historically and to date.

Black culture is the basis of popular culture in America. Throughout history and 21 years into the 21st century, Black women's trends and aesthetic choices have been central to the establishment and development of popular music, food, fashion, and beauty in America. So, it is a disheartening irony that Africana beauty culture is so widely reflected in popular culture but so limited in the representations and considerations therein. Black beauty culture and salons are employed widely as points of emphasis or as the setting-backdrop in periodicals, television, music, radio broadcasts, social media, film, and advertisements that are associated with the aforementioned media. However, representations of Black beauty culture and salons in popular culture are scarcely connected to the development of Black women's autonomy and agency in America. Some African American popular music is an exception. There has been a shift in Hip-Hop and R&B culture in recent years where African hair styles specifically braided styles, have been worn by artists in music videos, periodical covers, award shows, and other public presentations. R&B Singer, Beyoncé's *Black is King* film and Hip-Hop artists Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion's music video for their song "WAP" exemplify this recent shift. As *Black is King* features Beyoncé in various braided hair styles, viewers can be reminded of braids discussed in the descriptions of orisha, braids created

in braiding galleries and on porches, and braids donned by Black women walking the streets of their city centers. While watching the “WAP” music video the up-do and pin up hair styles of Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion may be reminiscent of ascending and gravity-defying sculpted hair styles Black women wore on college campuses in the 1990s and 1960s respectively, or those that could be saw in the long lines of night clubs and neighborhood cookouts in a city center during the mid to latter 20th century. The visual presentations of African hair and beauty culture may seem at-home or properly located as they exist within the genres of Hip-Hop and R&B where a majority of the artists are of African descent and reflections of African hair are frequently applauded. However, it is important to understand that the current state of Black beauty salon and beauty culture representation is characterized by cooption of Black content within American popular culture. Elements of the salon and beauty culture are frequently incorporated into popular media in effort to connect with Black audiences, but such visual, audio, and print content fail to address the historical origin of Black beauty culture and fails to address the cases of injustice imposed upon African people in America because of our hair, skin, and nails.

Advertisers have realized the power of Black beauty culture and the Black beauty salon as sacred and significant staples in Black women’s identity, yet many Africana people are ridiculed in America for leveraging that power in day-to-day interactions. Cases of hair discrimination and injustice have been discussed by major new outlets, including the incident when high school student Andrew Johnson who was forced to cut his locs publicly before a high school wrestling match in December of 2018. The case where high school cheerleader Asia Simo was treated unfairly in comparison to her white

teammates because her hair did not conform to the desired competition hair style in 2020 is yet another example of discrimination and injustice predicated on Black hair.

Although the two cases were covered in popular news media, advertisers and other media sources that frequently use Black beauty culture in their content provided no aid or notable attention to those children. This juxtaposition of African representation without African empowerment characterizes the current nature and status of Black beauty culture and Black beauty salons in American popular culture.

At present, the African American beauty salon is thriving on social media. While this analysis considers social media engagements of beauty culture or what is called *the social media salon* herein, to be an extension of the African American beauty salon, others have called it by a different name, including Gino Canella's *Digital Salon* notion as briefly discussed in the article “#BlackIsBeautiful [*sic*]: The Radical Politics of Black Hair”. Although Canella does not delve deeply into the discursive components of the salon in cyberspace, he narrates an accurate depiction of the salon's qualities and how they appear on social media by synthesizing concepts espoused by beauty culture scholars like Tiffany M. Gill. Within the *social media salon*, beauty culture is characterized by separation and hierarchy amongst hair styles and types along with a rather frequent rejection of the salon. Rejection of the salon shows up in social media through the sharing of horror stories such as those mentioned in the *Black salon problems* hashtag, within the impetus of do-it-yourself learning, and frequently as part of the focus on consumerism of beauty products as opposed to beauty salon services. Canella eloquently captures the nature and environment of the digital salon as a derivative of Black history where he writes “[F]or generations, beauty salons and barbershops have

offered Black women and men spaces to not only style their hair but also to find community and conversation”. Tiffany M. Gill provides context for the nature of digital salon and the social media salon concepts in “#Teamnatural: Black Hair and The Politics of Community In Digital Media” where she states “Digital spaces can often replicate the information sharing and exchange of advice that are so crucial to black women’s lives” (95). The origin of the entrepreneurial spirit that is replicated in digital and social media spaces in present-day society are evidenced in the Black beauty salon’s discursive development during the New Negro Movement which is further explored in chapter five. The discourse of the social media salon is also described in greater detail within chapters seven and eight, as they discuss the development and impact of the Internet in beauty culture during the 20th and 21st centuries. Overall, Canella and Gill’s above-mentioned quotes characterize a clear significance of the salon in the lives of Black women, to the extent that it has been replicated virtually.

The salon is also important in the realm of health and wellness which also has its own in-person and social media presence. The association between African American hair and physical health is not a new discursive topic in Black women’s beauty culture, however, it has only recently been considered in the academic space. In “Centering Perspectives on Black Women, Hair Politics, and Physical Activity” Shellae Versey illuminates the significance of the societal need to consider the intersections of hair care for African American women and other areas of existence. Versey presents a dialogue, study, and call to action where she writes,

Why do some African American women feel such strong ties to their hair that they will avoid exercise? What can be done to understand this phenomenon and address alternatives that may make both hair maintenance and regular exercise feasible? I map a theoretical argument for why hair matters for some women, and

discuss how physical activity intervention strategies might be improved by considering such complexities (104). African American women are disproportionately impacted by a number of health issues and while health care organizations have tried a myriad of strategies to address said disparity, they have failed at doing so in a way that centers African perspectives. For Black women, hair is significant, down to one's physical health and wellness; in many instances the matter of hair is never too small for discussion when it comes to African American women.

Splitting Hairs is not a mere title for this chapter but also part of Black beauty culture discourse at present. The superfluous presence of the term *splitting hairs* as a reflection of constant dealings with seemingly petty issues in the matter of hair, in current discourse and events (especially those within educational spaces) speaks to the epistemological value of beauty culture and the salon even when it is located outside of the salon space. After the review of several titles for events and even curriculum that mirrors sentiments from the African American salon and beauty culture phenomenon, it becomes clear that beauty culture is ubiquitous when captured in African American discourse. In February of 2020, The University of Utah hosted a panel discussion entitled, "Splitting Hairs: Black Hair and the Fight to be Seen as Professional" and The Yale National featured a curriculum entitled "Splitting Hairs: Comparing Themes in Fiction and Non-Fiction Texts" which includes an engagement of Chris Rock's *Good Hair*, Olympian Gabrielle Douglas's hair, President Barack Obama's hair, and *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. Engagements of beauty culture within academic educational spaces and events enables people to imagine how beauty culture existed in the past outside of the four walls of a salon. If one opens his or her imagination to

consider the ways in which beauty culture functioned without the physical salon space, the act of mentally envisioning images or concepts could liberate African ancestors who have been marginalized in history as their humanity was snatched in the context of beauty culture. As enslaved Africans were removed from their home, they did not have the tools and materials to complete their grooming routines, thus, making the retention of African beauty culture a more arduous task; the imposition of European beauty practices and standards as part of the enslaving process added to the difficulty of cultural retention. Thus, the historical evidence of an African-centered beauty culture (albeit in the form of European accounts or the recollections of Africans) amongst enslaved Africans is not only surprising, but also phenomenal. African hair grooming practices within the confines of enslavement created a myriad of products and processes that exist in African American beauty culture at present. African hair grooming practices also involved beauty culture discourse during the time of enslavement, which contributed the foundations of the *shop talk* and overall beauty culture discourse that exists today. The cultural retentions, inventions, and contributions of Africans within the confines of enslavement are far from trivial, instead, they represent matters of beauty, matters of identity, and revolutionary actions that have long deserved attention as a source of agency for African women, men, and children in America. In “Black Hair Salons Play A Medicinal Role That’s More Soothing Now Than Ever,” writer Funmi Fetto who was located in London, England, shares an intimate anecdote about her first return visit to the salon during the pandemic, she writes:

My stylist meticulously began to partition my hair into sections and oiled my scalp in preparation for the braiding process. I became conscious of the music playing in the background – Afrobeats, ’90s RnB [*sic*], Rihanna, Megan Thee Stallion – and

had to resist the urge to move my head to the beat. I heard the soft banter between the stylists as they spoke in their mother tongues; I listened as other Black women complimented one another on their chosen hair styles; and I watched in awe – through the mirror – as my stylist, humming along to the tunes, began to transform my afro into exquisite, neat, shiny rows of plaits expertly braided close to my scalp. These seemingly inconsequential moments give an insight into why the Black hair salon is such a special place; they are simple moments but they connect me to my culture.

Still, I can't deny that this experience was different. I talked much less with my stylist than I normally would because the barriers of the mask go beyond the physical. The atmosphere was also different. The music was the same, but the usual high-level merriment – sometimes there would be dancing – had given way to its more understated relative. There were now moments of silence and contemplation and a heightened awareness of human fragility. Nevertheless, I left with my soul soothed and my hair a glorious ode to my heritage. And I felt uplifted, optimistic and thoroughly convinced of the medicinal role a visit to the Black hair salon will continue to play in the lives of Black women.

While this work focuses on African women in America, it also encompasses the power, significance, and continuity of diasporic perspectives in the larger context of African women's beauty culture. When one subscribes to the notion that culture does not occur in a vacuum, Fetto's sentiments about a medicinal role or function of the salon speak to intangible spirit matters of African beauty culture that are present throughout the African diaspora. The power of *asé* that functions in the African American beauty salon and beauty culture, harken back to African ancestral development and cultivation of beauty culture during the period of enslavement. The period of African enslavement in America was a time when the direct discourse of African women was scarcely documented or recorded. However, enslaved African women must have engaged in dialogue and exchanges regarding grooming and beauty, or else the epistemological remnants that exist in beauty culture in America and throughout the African diaspora would be nonexistent. As history has frequently silenced our ancestors during the period of enslavement, it is the duty of those engaged in Afrocentric study of present-day beauty culture, to dig into

the archives and historical texts to enliven their voices and honor the knowledge that lives in our hair and beauty culture from our hair roots to headwraps. Thus, this work treks discursively from the land of the known in which the salon is revered contemporarily, into what is unknown in regard to the development of sacred epistemological space and forces of agency that promote radical identity.

CHAPTER 3: SPEAKING IT INTO EXISTENCE: AFRICAN ORIGINS OF BEAUTY, DISCOURSE, AND SACREDNESS AS HISTORICAL CONTEXT (KEMET 2000-15TH CENTURY WEST AFRICA)

Definitions belong to the definers, not the defined.
—Toni Morrison, *Beloved*

*Pretty women wonder where my secret lies.
I'm not cute or built to suit a fashion model's size
But when I start to tell them,
They think I'm telling lies...
Men themselves have wondered
What they see in me.
They try so much
But they can't touch
My inner mystery.*
—Maya Angelou, "Phenomenal Woman"

More than 3,500 years after the reign of Kemet's first female king or female per-aa, Sobeknefru, many people are still astonished by the agency of Kemetic women and the historical differences in gender concepts; thus, identity controversy looms large. Although this analysis does not divulge copious information about Kemetic women outside of the Middle Kingdom, it advances conversations about women's identity and aesthetics through an etymological study of African women's beauty discourse as it emerged from beauty culture in Kemet. In *Black Women in Antiquity*, Ivan Van Sertima gives credence to intrigue with African beauty culture in Kemet and the phenomenological nature of it in a reference to Egyptian women where he writes, "the imagination of the world, not just that of Africa, was haunted by these black women" (5). The power and prowess of Kemetic women still astonishes minds throughout the world and this is made evident in continuous attempts to replicate and stake claim to the legacy of such women through language and representation.

As the year 2020 neared its end, a vast majority of the globe continued to ponder the future in regard to human fate amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition to concerns

about mortality and the impact of the novel coronavirus, the fourth quarter of 2020 in the United States of America was also characterized by substantial indetermination. When would a vaccine be released, and would it be safe to administer? What would it take for the government to realize the depth of racism in America and the significance of Black lives? Would a woman of Jamaican and Indian parentage be voted in as vice president of the United States of America? Was it appropriate to cast the woman who played Wonder Woman in 2017 and 2020 as Cleopatra for an upcoming film¹⁰? The latter conundrum of movie casting may appear trivial when contrasted against the concerns that precede it herein, however, debates about the cultural background of the actress to play Cleopatra persisted as manifestation of a continued desire for definition. The legacy of Cleopatra and her heritage have been a controversial topic and matter of debate since antiquity and has historically been faction and tool in Eurocentric universalisms and domination. What lies in the midst of people's opinions regarding the ethnicity or racial background of an actress against matters of life in death in literal terms during the last quarter of 2020, is a clear need to delve deeper into definitions.

Following the notion that definitions belong to the definers, not the defined and applying such to the case of Cleopatra VII- an African woman whose features were removed from statues and modified to reflect European features - illuminates the gravity and depth of consequence that moving one's narrative out of his or her respective culture can have for generations. The focus on appearance of the actress without discussion of

¹⁰ Several articles, including "Gal Gadot as Cleopatra in New Movie About Egyptian Queen is Causing Outrage" written by Arash Azizi for NBC News, capture the widespread and generally controversial conversations about cultural and historical accuracy in the visual representation of Cleopatra in the Patty Jenkins Cleopatra film set to star Gal Gadot who is an actress of Israeli decent.

how well one could convey Cleopatra's qualities as a leader, can also illuminate just how much of the human existence of a person can be pushed to the margin in order for an idea or ideal to reign supreme. Aside from the narrative of a femme fatale or fatal female leader who drove a wedge between European men and their countries (i.e., Antony and Caesar), much is unknown in regard to the lived experiences of Cleopatra. Cleopatra is widely admired and vilified for her beauty simultaneously, which places an emphasis on her beauty, regardless of one's opinion of her. With consideration of the emphasis on Cleopatra's beauty, one could wonder what did Cleopatra do to remain so beautiful and what were her daily habits in regard to beautification? What did this beautification mean to her? If Cleopatra's beauty impacted European men so much, how did she harness the power to be able to do so through her visual representation and other intangible manifestations of her womanhood? Not many people in academia or popular culture have concerned themselves with the beauty habits of Cleopatra or those of women in Kemet before her who clearly established a tradition of leadership and agency in which Cleopatra fell. However, an Afrocentric approach to the history of Kemet can provide scholars a means to actually see Cleopatra and other African women of antiquity as multifaceted people. In *The History of Africa: The Quest for Eternal Harmony*, Molefi K. Asante brings Cleopatra's leadership and lineage into context where he writes,

Her name sits reasonably comfortably [*sic*] with Hatshepsut, Ramses II, Nefertari, Akhenaten, and Thutmoses III, as an icon of Kemet history. But she differed from all the others in that her reign and her ancestry have been complicated by a quest to make her white, European, perhaps even completely Greek... It is generally agreed that she was a descendant of the Ptolemy... Almost no scholar of note disagrees with that position. What is at stake here is the question of the lineage of Ptolemy. Could the Ptolemaic line in Egypt have remained purely Macedonian for three centuries without any African genetic content entering the lineage? This appears highly improbable, given the nature of human societies... (83).

Asante's words bring forth two topics of identity that are central to the analysis herein: one is the recognition of a history of infatuation with the identity of Cleopatra that often promotes ideas that may not be confounded; the other is the notion that continuous arguments about her cultural background demonstrate a need for further exploration and definition. Although early 21st century research and scholarship have supported the notion that Cleopatra was African through discovery of her sister Arsinoe's tomb, skeletal investigation, and the assumption that the sisters were born unto the same mother¹¹, many people continue to vehemently doubt her Africanity; Asante associates such disbelief with the idea that,

the European Egyptologists racialized an African society in terms that reflected European conquest from the 15th to the 19th century. Cleopatra could not have been black, or could not have had African blood, as far as they were concerned. After all, she had children by Roman caesars and generals. One can imagine that this fact alone probably shut the door to the Egyptologists' thinking about the ancestry of Cleopatra. How could these Roman leaders have had children with an African woman? She had to be white, as white as the late movie star, Elizabeth Taylor, who played Cleopatra in the 1963 film (84).

If scholars continue to approach studies of African women in Kemet through the use of racialized historical research, without questioning it, it is likely that debates will continue to limit Cleopatra in regard to her African lineage and her leadership for another 58 years or more, from movie screens to the halls of academia. Through the etymological

¹¹ Asante discusses the findings of Hilke Thuer and elaborates on details of the sibling relationship of Cleopatra and Arsinoe, noting "What we know is that the sibling rivalry between the sisters led to the death of Arsinoe...The story of sibling rivalry, betrayal, and murder would be written in the continent's history from Ethiopia to South Africa, and from Ghana to Somalia, but such guile is also a common human condition" (84). This passage and the relationship between Cleopatra and Arsinoe are significant to this study not only because it further connects Cleopatra to her African lineage, but also because it brings her further into existence through family relation, and it reflects her human qualities.

approach to phenomena within this chapter, one can understand: the life and times of Cleopatra VII; the power of African women in antiquity; and the sacred nature that lies in African American beauty culture when contextualized in Kemetic history.

The etymological study herein explores terms associated with styles, tools, locations, roles, and rituals associated with African women's beauty practices in Kemet. As previously stated, hair has been a meaningful part of culture for African women since antiquity. This meaning has been one of gender, leadership, and spiritual emphasis amongst other things. The basis of Kemetic beauty culture is referenced in Camille Yarborough's article "Female Style and Beauty in Ancient Africa: A Photo Essay" where she writes "The use of magic, medicine and religion to achieve good/beauty, coupled with an evolving aesthetic sense was the starting point in the development of the concept of style and beauty in Ancient Africa" (89). Yarborough's words indicate and historicize the intrinsic nature of Africana beauty culture over time by delineating where the material and non-material intersect. Within the intersection of magic, medicine, and religion, where the good and the beautiful functioned synonymously, the necessitation of Ma'at is very evident. Ma'at, as a principle of life, is central to all other Kemetic beauty culture elements to be discussed herein, and it also distinguishes Kemetic beauty culture (and through cultural continuity, other African diasporic manifestations of women's beauty culture as well) from non-African definition, thus illuminating both the unique and the sacred nature of African women's beauty culture. Similar to the ways in which the leaders (kings, queens, etc.) of Kemet were expected to uphold the principles of Ma'at, further exploration of terms relating to hair stylists and beauty reveal the relationship between beauty culture and notions of sacredness in Kemet.

Ma'at was manifest in every aspect of life in Kemet and hair was not an exception. In *Aesthetic Ideal in Kemet: An Afrocentric Examination*, Willie Cannon Brown, writes “[b]eauty was a telos of a style of life for the people of Kemet,” thus it was not a void idea or action, but the objective aim of life (4). The virtues of Ma'at are truth, justice, propriety, harmony, balance, reciprocity, and order- which are manifest in rightness in thought, emotion, speech, and conduct.¹² Ma'at is often associated with a female likeness. The contextualization of Ma'at as female is a profound concept. Not only is femininity divine but through the manner in which Denise Martin mentions that, Ma'at's presence in Kemet represents a clear element of sacredness amongst women. In “Maat and Order in African Cosmology: A Conceptual Tool for Understanding Indigenous Knowledge,” Martins writes

Maat is defined nicely by Budge (1960) as “goddess of the unalterable laws of heaven” (p. 185). This definition is profound because it encapsulates the epistemological core of this work. Maat as goddess means that the idea she represents is sacred in the collective mind of the Egyptians. *Maat* is identified, conceptualized, deified, and worthy of conscious praise and adoration. Thus, it becomes a part of the religious culture of the Egyptians. In addition, *goddess* recalls a time when civilizations were matriarchical in belief and practice (Diop, 1991; Wood, 1996). Last, *goddess* invokes an axiom of Thoth, which states “gender is in everything, everything has its Masculine and Feminine principles” (Chandler, 1999, p. 97). The Yoruba also adhere to this axiom, with each of the 400+1 orisha having a masculine or feminine designation. Next, “unalterable laws” implies both the permanence of maat and the obligation of humanity to acknowledge, follow, and uphold these laws. This gives an ontological basis for maat as the governing law for Egyptian society that focused on maintaining maat. Last, “of heaven” gives a cosmic sense to the concept. Not only do we have the principle being a goddess, unchanging, and a mandate for humanity, maat includes everything in the cosmos (956).

¹² Elaboration provided in the “Maat” entry in the *Encyclopedia of Black Studies*

Per Martin's definition, not only is Ma'at in everything masculine and feminine, it is also innately sacred by definition, thus, deeming African beauty culture sacred when contextualized in the history of Kemet. As a guiding ethical principal of Kemet, Ma'at can also be observed in many of the terms relating to hair and an etymological interrogation of such terms illuminates a connection therein.

As characterized above, Ma'at is the opposite of isfet¹³; and collectively, her principles lead to Hotep¹⁴. The inclusion of Ma'at lends itself to a sacredness in beauty culture which is historically unique to Kemet. When the term beauty culture is defined in a contemporary or Westernized context, one of the most popular or widely reviewed definitions comes from Milady¹⁵. Beauty culture is defined in the *Salon Ovations Cosmetology Dictionary* publication, as "pertaining to cosmetology; the study and practice of the improvement of personal appearance; personal grooming performed on another person" (58). Although it captures many of the immediate associations one may

¹³ *The Declarations of Innocence* and *The Book of the Dead* are two texts that reflect the significance of not producing isfet and illuminate it as a component of judgement in afterlife and morality determinations within a Kemetic context. Isfet, derived from Mdw Ntr, is referred to by Karenga as "falsehood, injustice, and disorder" and also referenced as evil in many instances in his seminal text *Maat: The Moral Ideal in Ancient Egypt* (164). Isfet is critical in the afterlife phase of judgment which Maulana Karenga eloquently describes in the *Encyclopedia of African Religion* within five phases of afterlife which are: 1) resurrection, (2) ascension, (3) judgment, (4) acceptance, and (5) transformation.

¹⁴ According to an entry in *The Encyclopedia of African Religion* Hotep "is a concept of ancient Kemetic origin. It originally meant *to rest, to be happy, to be present, to be at or to go to rest, to rely upon, and to be at peace with*. Ancient Kemites were a peace-loving people and considered Hotep to be not just a part of everyday vocabulary, but a concept that extended beyond a calm demeanor or behavior".

¹⁵ Milady is an educational company which describes itself as "...the leading, most trusted source of beauty and Wellness education" which has functioned since 1927 and continues to sell content in cosmetology, esthetics, barbering, nail technology, therapeutic message, and Master Educator Teacher Training.

make when hearing the term beauty culture, the definition provided is not robust enough to encompass all that occurs in the African diasporic or African American beauty interactions beyond physical change or bodily modification—quite simply it does not capture the sacred metaphysical nature of African American beauty engagement, salons, discourse, and collective culture. When examining phenomena through an African cosmology and by extension an Afrocentric paradigm, personal appearance alone (without the presence of function or the activation of consciousness¹⁶) for oneself or another does not necessitate significance or importance, nor does the singular study of a subject without a function as indicated in the term cosmetology. As cited in the above-mentioned *beauty culture* definition from Milady and in its general use in Westernized contexts, cosmetology¹⁷ describes the maintenance, study of, or praxis regarding hair, skin, and nails. Many cosmetology publications begin with a definition of the term *cosmetology* itself and shortly thereafter, make mention of Egyptians as the first to cultivate beauty; given the proximity of definitions and dates in such texts (Egyptians as the first), one who engages the common beauty text to date, may assume that the provided definition was the idea functioning in the minds of Egyptians or Kemites in antiquity, however, an etymological engagement with the term cosmetology complicates such suppositions.

¹⁶ Ama Mazama's *Afrocentric Paradigm* asserts and describes the three aspects of the Afrocentric paradigm from which this work functions; they are the cognitive, structural, and functional aspects.

¹⁷ Milady's *Salon Ovarions Cosmetology Dictionary* provides the following definition of cosmetology as the art or science of beautifying and improving the skin, nails, and hair; the study of cosmetics and their application" (123).

The origin of the term cosmetology is generally recognized as Greek. The Greek term *kosmetikos*, is cited similarly in many works including *Historical Importance of Beauty* by Neelam Vashi who references it as “skilled in decorating”. The *Milady Standard Cosmetology* textbook (13th edition) defines it as “skilled in the use of cosmetics” (6). Daniel C. Townsend’s *Foundations of Stage Makeup* defines it as “meaning harmony, tranquility, and order” and characterizes it by saying “These ancient peoples [*sic*] sought to unify the body by creating their ancient image of beauty through cosmetic products”, bearing similarity to the tenets of Ma’at (2). Many definitions of cosmetology, like those mentioned above are not representative of the engagements observable within Kemetic historical texts. Popular definitions of beauty culture also fail to represent that which continues to exist in African American beauty culture to date, or like the latter definition provided by Townsend, many resemble the principles of Ma’at without giving attribution to the origin therein. In Kemetic beauty culture, there are several individual names for products, actions, and concepts which one in contemporary times may readily associate with the term cosmetology in its European definition(s), however, evidence of such an all-encompassing term is sparse in Kemetic history. *Kosmetikos* also fails to provide insight into the personhood of those who participated in beauty work or the sacred nature of frequent beauty engagement as such existed in Kemet. When characteristics of inadequacy and unattributed similarity between Greek cosmetology definitions and Kemetic beauty culture at antiquity are made evident, an Afrocentric engagement of such an ironic dichotomous situation reveals the possibility of historical misinformation.

With regard for Cheikh Anta Diop's groundbreaking research on Africa as the home of civilization, the inadequate yet similar etymological qualities of *kosmetikos* and Kemetic beauty culture discourse can be attributed to the era in which the "negro myth" came into development as part of Greek and Roman usurpation and imposition. In *The African Origin of Civilization*, Diop writes,

When Herodotus visited it, Egypt had already lost its independence a century earlier. Conquered by the Persians in 525, from then on it was continually dominated by the foreigner: after the Persians came the Macedonians under Alexander (333 B.C.), the Romans under Julius Cesar (50B.C.) ...Ruined by all these successive invasions, Egypt, the cradle of civilization for 10,000 years while the rest of the world was steeped in barbarism would no longer play a political role. Nevertheless, it would long continue to initiate the younger Mediterranean peoples (Greeks and Romans, among others) into the enlightenment of civilization. Throughout Antiquity it would remain the classic land where the Mediterranean peoples went on pilgrimages to drink at the fount of scientific, religious, moral, and social knowledge, the most ancient such knowledge that mankind had acquired (10).

Following the notion espoused by Diop, one is reminded of the issues that persisted in the era of Greek and Roman imposition, specifically during the conquest of Alexander and the reign of Cleopatra VII. Considering the war campaign that brought Alexander to Kemet and the historical disdain that Octavius had for Cleopatra VII, there is a possibility that issues with vanity and the representation of Cleopatra as a femme fatale was generated out of spite and that subsequent¹⁸and affiliated Eurocentric concepts dealing

¹⁸ A great deal of examples exist wherein Greeks and Romans changed or imposed their definitions on inhabitants of lands they conquered; the notion of vanity is one such example as it is frowned upon within Christianity. Biblical texts, in circulation now and those that were removed in the past reflect probable disdain of Kemetic norms and support the notion that many terms in beauty culture in antiquity were stolen from Kemet or completely stricken from Eurocentric historical texts; this is exemplified in Annette Yoshiko Reed's "Angelic Descent and Apocalyptic Epistemology: The Teachings of Enoch and the Fallen Angels in the Book of the Watchers" from *Fallen Angels and the History of Judaism and Christianity: The Reception of Enochic Literature*, which demonstrates an early European religious

with beauty and the corporeal, were generated or popularized from that same line of abhorrent thought. Accordingly, in Alexander's attempts to Hellenize Kemet, it is likely—and quite evident in many ways—that his focus was not on celebrating the ways of the Kemetic people, but rather on making his domination of the Persians more evident through imposition of Greek norms and pilfering of Kemetic culture. Thus, the origin of the term *kosmetikos* as one that is solely Greek, is questionable and the use of a Greek defined term in engagements of African beauty culture history in antiquity is not befitting. As the etymological contextualization of African beauty culture continues herein by exploring discursive content of Kemet (as opposed to solely Western definitions like the Greek term *kosmetikos*), Ma'at will be employed as a guiding principle to understand the notion of sacredness in beauty culture as it emanates from Kemet.

Denials of the anteriority of Kemet as a forerunner of civilization were vast in antiquity and continue to persist today. However, this etymological study of beauty discourse in Kemet can contribute to the body of works, such as that of Diop, Karenga, and Asante, that represent Kemet as the home of civilization, while providing a sacred hearthstone for contemporary African woman's beauty culture throughout the diaspora.

engagement with cosmetology where she writes the following about the removed Book of Enoch:

In attributing the introduction of metalworking, cosmetics, sorcery, and divination to Asael and other Watchers, *1 En.* 8 may reflect a shared set of cultural connotations, in which the mining of metals is seen as a mysterious and paradigmatically hubristic human activity [*sic*]. This complex may help to explain the inclusion of cosmetology, since this discipline involved a manipulation of chemicals akin to pharmacology. Even as *1 En.* 8:2 implies a critique of female vanity as an emblem of humanity's civilized decline, it may ground its plausibility in the widespread suspicion of chemical skills in Greco-Roman culture (40).

There is a great deal of information available on the topic of the construction and function of knowledge and identity from Kemet, and in the context of beauty culture, primary source information is abundant in the 11th dynasty. Throughout various Kemetic works of art and representations of life, African women are shown wearing wigs, eyeliner, and more. However, there are few reliefs that depict beauty in praxis, yet one of the foremost cited reliefs of women in Kemet is that of Queen Kawit of the 11th dynasty of Kemet or ancient Egypt. Many captions associated with the depiction of Queen Kawit on her sarcophagus only directly state the actions that appear in the relief.¹⁹ However, attention to the interactions within the relief and the fact that it is inscribed into a sarcophagus creates the gateway for a chronological and cartographic exploration of the sacred nature of beauty practices amongst African women throughout the diaspora. Within the depiction of Queen Kawit one can observe the queen having her hair styled (specifically adding extensions) by another woman which features some of the same practices that occur today in beauty salons amongst African American female patrons. As accoutrements are added to the hair the women in the relief are also drinking and holding a mirror in the same positioning that can be observed in beauty salons today. While the actions in the relief are described in reference to sheer human movement, it is also important to examine the implications of allowing a person to stand behind a woman of honorable status. When such a royal person allows another person to stand behind them, especially with objects that can be used to bring harm, the royal patron is left at a

¹⁹ This is exemplified in a PBS Learning Media reference entitled “Queen Kawit at Her Toilet, from the sarcophagus of Queen Kawit, found at Deir el-Bahri, Middle Kingdom, c.2061-2010 BC” where there is an evident emphasis on the toilet aspect but none of human interaction in the relief.

disadvantage. Thus, the fact that beauty engagements are represented with such logistical arrangement of persons, denotes a relationship of trust between service provider and patron. The level of trust depicted on the sarcophagus not only beckons questions about activity and sacred space, but it also provokes interrogations of the sacredness of the person entrusted with conducting that beauty transformation. Additionally, the level of trust reflected on the sarcophagus provokes questions about the conversations between the beauty provider and patron. It is likely that communication ensued as Queen Kawit held the mirror to see what was going on with her hair while discussing the beverage she was consuming and common topics like the weather. Through the use of critical fabulation²⁰ one is able to contemplate the beauty practices of Kemet and further explore the role, significance, and sanctity of the beauty practitioner who was entrusted with the act of styling the queen's hair. Thus, an examination of the Kemet hair stylist may reveal the sacred nature of both the beautification process and that of the hair stylist as an agent of change and maintenance.

In Kemet there were several terms used to denote the position of a hair stylist. Words such as *ir-šn(y)* and *irt-šn(y)* were used to refer to a male and female hair stylist respectively²¹. While many of the inscriptions and tombs including such terms

²⁰ In Sadiya Hartman's speculative text "Venus in Two Acts," she reconsiders what the narrative in the life of an enslaved African female was like beyond the bounds of archival information. Through Hartman's reconsideration the enslaved women within the story of *Venus* are given a full narrative that consists of many of the conventions that are associated with humanist descriptions today. While Hartman develops a compelling narrative within this article, she begins to interrogate the effects of adding *humanistic* details to archival narratives.

²¹ The *the History of Science, Technology, and Medicine in Non-Western Cultures* these terms were used between 2613 BCE and 332 BCE to refer to those who served as "hairmaker, hairdoer, or wigmaker".

primarily appeared in the former form, which refers to men, it is important to explore the fact that female hair practitioners were also included in such representations of Kemetic life. In “Hair in Egypt: People and Technology Used in Creating Egyptian Hair styles and Wigs”, featured in the *Encyclopaedia of the History of Science, Technology, and Medicine in Non-Western Cultures*, G.J. Tassie writes, “There is usually a modifying determinative after the word *ir-sheeny*, denoting that the bearer of the title was either a ‘royal hair stylist’ or an ‘overseer of hair stylists’” (1). Tassie also illuminates a legal aspect of the hair stylist’s involvement in beauty culture which reveals a discourse that had to go beyond the conversations between practitioner and client, to practitioner and legal bodies where he writes,

The hair styles that a person could wear were temporally dependent upon a person's social position and status. A form of sumptuary laws existed in Egypt regulating social etiquette with regards to what forms of hair style were permissible by various classes and statuses of individuals at certain occasions. These laws were not written down but were governed by social and courtly modes of behavior. The hair stylists through their creation of hair styles and wigs helped to perpetuate the hegemonic situation and reinforced the social relations, even when creating new styles. (Tassie 1)

In the words of Tassie, one can imagine ideas being shared by clients of noble status or otherwise as they received service and the service provider deciding to share the legal aspects of a selected style with fellow hairdressers and other clients. The roles and terms cited herein not only reveal that an organized structure existed in the field of hairstyling in Kemet, but also illuminates that notion that serving as a hair stylist was a role played by multiple women. A supervisory role or one where a hair stylist was to be in the service of royalty denotes not only the social status of women in Kemet but also shows that such women were held in high esteem amongst those of the kingdom and others. Similar to the ways in which the leaders (kings, queens, etc.) of Kemet were

expected to uphold the principles of Ma'at, further exploration of terms relating to hair stylists and beauty reveal the relationship between beauty culture and sacredness in Kemet.

Ma'at was manifest in every aspect of life in Kemet and hair was not an exception. The virtues of Ma'at are manifest in rightness in thought, emotion, speech, and conduct.²² As a guiding ethical principal of Kemet, Ma'at can also be observed in many of the terms relating to hair and an etymological interrogation of such terms illuminates a connection therein. Ma'at is at the core of a widespread hair-beauty compound concept, in which the concepts of hair and beauty are immediately associated together. It is important to note the function of Ma'at within that compound concept; while the concepts or principles of Ma'at denote beauty, the element that really allows the hair-beauty association to function is Nefer. Metaphorically the conceptual glue in the hair-beauty association is an adhesive amalgam of Nefer and Ma'at. Willie Cannon Brown elucidates the significance and relationship of Ma'at and beauty where she writes,

The aesthetic ideal in Kemet was rooted and grounded in Ma'at, that is truth and justice and nefer, which translated means beauty, perfection, and goodness. Ma'at and nefer were conceptions in Kemet. The conception of beauty in all forms of existence was united with their worldview. Knowledge of astrology, astronomy, mathematics, physics, medicine, etc. authored by Djhuty, scribe of the gods, laid the foundation for consistent precision in the daily lives of the people in areas such as architectonics, boat building, festivals and rituals, writing system, and the afterlife (4).

The ubiquitous nature of Nefer is brought to life through Brown's summation. Brown's words distinguish Nefer's role in metaphysical and physical domains of existence and endeavor, enabling those who etymologically explore the term Nefer and its associated

²² Elaboration provided in the "Maat" entry in the *Encyclopedia of Black Studies*

aesthetic concepts, to view it as inherently connected to Ma'at – truth, justice, propriety, harmony, balance, reciprocity, and order– through cosmological conception. The term Nefer is the root in the name of many female leaders of Kemet and multiple sources concur with Brown's aforementioned summary by defining it as a term directly referring to beauty. According to the *Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt* edited by Margaret R.

Bunson, Nefer had multiple meanings or uses, including

the hieroglyphic symbol for both “good” and “beautiful,” in both the material and spiritual sense” and “an AMULET [*sic*] used by ancient Egyptians to promote happiness and good fortune. Nefer amulets were placed on the areas of the stomach and windpipes of mummies in order to protect these organs (266).

Thus, a connection is observable between the very notion of beauty and the maintenance of Ma'at in Kemet- as beauty and goodness result from the execution of each of the aforementioned virtues of Ma'at. As beauty was spiritually and ethically manifest via Ma'at and as it was reflected in the outward appearance of Kemetite people across the social chasm, it is evident that beauty was important, subsequently making the creators of such beauty important too. Similar to the way that spiritual figures, political figures, and other societal leaders are revered as vessels of what is right and just, hair stylists in Kemet can also be revered as vessels of the maintenance of Ma'at. According to *The Encyclopaedia of the History of Science, Technology, and Medicine in Non-Western Cultures*, along with the previously mentioned terms, terms related to the hair stylist also included

...*nšt*, hairdresser, and *nšy*, which means “to dress hair.” These words are used occasionally from the Middle Kingdom onwards, but usually refer to a casual hairdresser. In ancient Egypt hair stylists were frequently important officials who held important offices in addition to their tonsorial duties (Tassie).

While the existence of a term for hair stylist in general shows the importance of such practitioners in Kemet, the delineation between that of a casual hairdresser and one who

was an important official reveals the possibility of a ceremonial or sacred nature that marked the difference between a casual practitioner and service to that of a royal practitioner and her service. A continued exploration into the performance of beauty services shall reveal beauty as sacred space and practice, specifically in a discussion of tools used.

Tools in any engagement are not only a marker of function but they also denote beliefs of a person or people at a given time and the tools of Kemetic beauty culture are part of a larger discursive history. Razors, combs, and hairpins are three tools that reflect discursive engagement. The following shift in the razor used between dynasties and kingdoms for cutting hair is representative of an active discourse in the beauty community. How and why would one choose to use another implement in beauty service without consulting with others? How would a tool become widely used without conversation? Answers to the previously mentioned basic questions represent conversations that likely occurred between African women in Kemet in antiquity. In “Hairstyling Technology and Techniques Used in Ancient Egypt”, GJ Tassie includes images that reflect a shift in implements that were used, including: a “[s]patula razor, symmetrical, parallel sides and ivory handle (UC 40660) – scraping type, Old Kingdom” and a “[p]rotruding or axe-shape razor (UC 40539) – scraping type, Middle Kingdom”. In support of the previous notion Tassie provides context for the evolution of the razors, wherein one can see an inclusion of Ma’at through the inclusion of art in razor designs that represented deities and spiritual concepts, within the following quote:

During the Middle Kingdom (2040–1650 BCE) the cutting edge of the symmetrical razor began to protrude laterally (Fig. 4b). Coming in at this time (Dynasty XII, 1985–1795 BCE) is the scalpel-like razor or *dg3* type razor (Davies, 1977). This type was made of a thin strip of metal (Fig. 4e), sharpened

at one end, which later incorporated a loop (often in the form of an animal, bird or deities' head), in which to rest the little finger in order to help rotate the razor (Petrie, 1917, p. 50). By Dynasty XVIII (1550–1295 BCE), the *mh'k* razor – one of the most characteristic pieces of toilette equipment of the New Kingdom (1550–1069 BCE) – had evolved into a hatchet-like form, with a wooden handle almost at a right angle to the cutting edge and a spur projecting from the rear of the razor. This is thought to have served as a counter-weight, to ensure proper balance and handling [*sic*] (Stead, 1986, p. 50) and also as a little finger rest. Petrie called this type of razor the (horizontal) rotating razor (Fig. 4c). The rotating strip metal razor resembled the later splayed symmetrical razor and proceeded to evolve throughout the New Kingdom, with small varieties becoming more popular. Eventually the symmetrical razor evolved into a vertical rotating form, with its cutting edge splaying out even more to form a half-moon arc (Fig. 4d). By the end of the New Kingdom (ca. 1069 BCE), the rotating razor had superseded the scraping form. From the Middle Kingdom the handles of the scraping form were made in increasingly ornate forms, and by the New Kingdom the handles displayed zoomorphic designs and representations of deities of love and birth such as Bes and Taweret.

In the aforementioned quote and as Tassie continues in the work with a discussion of a shift in the names of combs along with their designs and sizes, the conversations about utility and function of combs becomes all the more apparent. Similarly, Joann Fletcher discusses the hairpin in “The Egyptian Hair Pin: Practical, Sacred, Fatal” where she writes,

Yet beyond the realm of the everyday, the hairpin became a weapon with which two of the most famous women of antiquity were able to make spectacular political points as the Roman Republic imploded amidst state-sponsored murder and proscription...by far the most dramatic use of a hairpin in history is surely the means by which Antony's fifth and final wife Cleopatra VII, Egypt's last native-born pharaoh, most likely took her life.

As stated above, the hairpin shifts in use. Although the Europeans use of the hairpin from a tool in hairstyling to a weapon implies violence, the tool is still going through a transformation in its use and the narrative association of hair tools for African women is reflected; the story of hairpins and death and thus hair as protective medium must have spread amongst those in Kemet if it survives as myth today. Through a discussion of beauty tools in Kemet, a bridge is drawn to the future wherein African hair was used as

a means to many ends that represent the tenacity and agency of African people as enabled through African beauty culture. African hair was used as a tool for physiological survival during the middle passage as roots and seeds were often stored in braids or cornrows²³. African hair was used as tool for escape during the period of African enslavement when maps were cornrowed into a person's hair; this is discussed further within the sixth chapter of this work. African hair combs that featured cultural symbols were discovered in West Africa before the 20th century, similarly, picks or Afro combs that featured political symbols like a fist that was representative of Black Power were widely used by Africans the 1970s²⁴. Each of the aforementioned examples demonstrate the existence of an African beauty culture epistemology that emanates from Kemet, wherein hair, beauty culture, and the tools therein are is associated with metaphysical beliefs and survival.

Unlike some other sacred aspects of life in Kemet, there is no specific ceremony, ritual, god, or goddess associated with hair. With the exception of praise for goddesses like Hathor, who was often associated with the title “She of the Beautiful Hair”²⁵, there were no overt hair praises. However, hair is significant in many sacred

²³ Tinde van Andel's recorded interview entitled “How the Maroon Ancestors Hid Grains In Their Hair” features a female descendent of Africans who engaged in maroonage in Suriname. The interviewee shares information about the planting of rice seeds and pieces of cassava before she goes on to demonstrate how such food sources were placed into cornrows.

²⁴ The blog post entitled “600 Years of The Culture, Politics and Identity of The Afro Comb Explored” featured on The London School of Economic and Political Science website, written by Felicity Heywood explores the history of Afro combs from Kemet through the year 2013.

²⁵ “She of the Beautiful Hair” is a title bestowed upon Hathor and in many instances, she is ceremoniously venerated via actions involving hair. In *Creating a Hellenistic World* edited by Lloyd Jones and Andrew Erskine, the authors assert “Not only does she wear a

aspects of Kemetic life for women, including those which occurred in their daily lives. While the terms ritual²⁶ and ceremony denote rare or infrequent special occasions in contemporary thought, ceremonies or rituals could occur as regular aspects of life per their definitions in Kemet. Thus, Stephen Quirke provides context to the significance of hair or beauty in Kemet by referencing the work of Sally-Ann Ashton in 2013 within his text *Exploring Religion in Ancient Egypt* where he writes,

For the rich, the arranging of hair would itself become a ceremony, again for both genders, though most famously celebrated in scenes of hairstyling with hairpins for the women closest to the king, from 2000 [BC]. Different utensils appear to highlight this in different periods: where we might think of hair scissors, equipment of 2000– 1700 [BC] focused on hairpins, and that of 1500– 1300 [BC] on adding combs, often with figured handpieces, recalling fourth-millennium [BC] grooming arts (Quirke 50).

Considering Quirke’s remarks where hairstyling is deemed ceremonious, the hair stylist and the acts carried out therein draw nearer to notions of sacred. In an entry for the term hair in *The British Museum Dictionary of Ancient Egypt* by Ian Shaw and Paul Nicholson it is mentioned that the wealthy usually employed hairdressers and there is direct reference to the sarcophagus of Queen Kawit which displays a hairstyling procedure being performed using some of the tools mentioned by Quirke (117). As the entry in the

wide variety of hair styles and wigs, including a distinctive form of bouffant hair style ending in two spiral locks over the shoulders, but even her titles refer to her hair: Hathor is ‘she of the beautiful hair’[sic] and ‘Lady of the Lock’. Hymns praise her hair as being ‘finer than linen’ and ‘blacker than night, raisins and figs’.⁴⁹ Even her priestesses display abundant hair, often supplemented with a three-strand plait woven into their wigs (221).

²⁶ According to the *Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt* edited by Margaret R. Bunson rituals are defined as “...the often elaborate ceremonies conducted throughout all of the historical periods of Egypt as religious, magical, or state displays of power and belief. Such ceremonies depicted events taking place in the affairs of humans and the gods. In Egypt, rituals and beliefs were so closely bound that one could not exist without the other” (346).

work of Shaw and Nicholson continues, there is also a mention of archeological discoveries of facilities ²⁷ where wigmakers worked which not only demonstrates the space and industry therein but also legitimizes beauty as a form of financial and spiritual currency via the creation of beauty and prosperity. Whether one was wearing a wig or having a beauty service provided and regardless of social status, it is evident that hair was an important aspect of the life of people in Kemet, and that is specifically represented in the archeological findings relating to women therein.

Although archeological findings, such as tools, skeletal remains, and images depicted on sarcophagi reveal a great deal about beauty amongst women in Kemet, those are not the only means by which one can discover the significance and sacred nature of beauty amongst said women. Engagement with texts that interpret archeological representations of women in Kemet give credence to the existence of female leaders while also bringing forth the reality of beauty's significance for women in Kemet. In Simone Schwarz-Bart's text entitled *In Praise of Black Women Volume 1: Ancient African Queens*, she provides vivid interpretations of African women's roles in the formation of the world by adding narratives to aspects of history that are often left dull and lifeless in Eurocentric recollections and accounts. One of the women featured in the text is Ahmose-Nofretari. As Schwarz-Bart provides a lively interpretation of the image of Ahmose-Nofretari ²⁸ as represented in her funerary temple, she makes mention of beauty aspects and reveals the power of veneration of the ancestors where she states

²⁷ 1974 a team of archaeologists discovered the remains of a wig maker's shop of the Middle and New Kingdom (Shaw and Nicholson 117).

²⁸ Shaw and Nicholson write, "Perhaps the most influential of the New Kingdom royal women, whose political and religious titles, like those of her grandmother TETISHERI and mother AI-IHOTEP I, have helped to illuminate the various new political roles

There are many Egyptian figures that have become unrecognizable, their images destroyed by posterity's strange posthumous revenge. But the veneration which surrounds Ahmose-Nofretari has left her image intact, and one can see it evolve into stone and wood, as well as mural frescoes, *black* skin, beautiful face, elegant, her hair crowned with feathers (35).

Veneration is just one aspect of African culture that not only keeps the sacred intact but also supports the idea that culture is transferred beyond the bounds of space and time. By illuminating the place of African women in the narratives that have created the world of the past and present, one can come to investigate and understand the concepts of beauty, female leadership, female representation in African terms, and power (as it relates to agency) for African women. Simone Schwarz-Bart's use of critical fabulation in her interpretation of African women from an African space of agency illuminates the power of cultural continuity across space and time.

Concepts of beauty such as appreciation, practices, and most importantly beauty in relation to the maintenance of spiritual and social order that originated in Kemet can be observed amongst African women in America due to transmission of culture across space and time. In *Libation: An Afrikan Ritual of Heritage in the Circle of Life*, Kimani Nehusi eloquently details the transmission of culture in the midst of migration where he writes,

When a people migrate, especially en masse, or, as in the case of most Afrikans in Arab lands and in the West, were made to migrate, they do not leave their culture behind. They take their culture with them, for culture cannot be peeled off and separated from a people like a discarded shirt and left behind like another forgotten or unwanted garment or a house or a farm or like any other material possession. Modifications, the consequences of challenges of space, place and time, which often translate into the compulsion to work with new or differing materials in new and differing environments, account for variations, transformations and discontinuities.

adopted by women in the early 18th [d]ynasty (see QUEENS) ... She became the object of a posthumous religious cult, sometimes linked with that of Amenhotep I, particularly in connection with the workmen's village at OEIR EL-MEDINA, which they were considered to have jointly founded" (Shaw and Nicholson 19).

Thus, the above etymological exploration of Kemetic reliefs has set the precedent for an interrogation of African American female beauty culture as sacred and fosters further exploration of the people and practices involved herein, including but not limited to: the beauty practitioner as priestess, the practices as sacred, and the energy and products created therein as agency producing mechanisms. As this work employs Afrocentric theory in its core, before venturing across time and the African continent, it is important to note the significance of applying Afrocentricity to the study of Kemetic beauty culture, which in essence is narrated where Ferreira writes, “The philosophical, cosmological, and ontological sense of the world inherited from ancient Kemet that are the conceptual building blocks of Afrocentricity represent, therefore, not a mere paradigmatic shift but a paradigmatic and epistemological rupture in the worldwide history of ideas... Where it is a corrective to distorted knowledge, Afrocentricity promotes human equality overcoming any socially constructed hierarchies: racial or ethnic, national, economic, and gendered” (167). Thus far, this discursive analysis has done what many other analyses of beauty culture have not done, which is to disrupt a worldview while discussing beauty culture and African women. Many other explorations of beauty culture, albeit in Kemet or elsewhere, attempt to solidify a place in European or Eurocentric worldview by using their tools or attempting to claim space within their definitions and narratives of beauty; this chapter has established not only historical context for the remainder of the work herein, but it has also established the basis for an epistemological breach in universalisms, marginalizing notions, and other limiting projections about Africana women’s beauty and identity both in antiquity and beyond.

Before reaching the United States and prior to exploring contemporary African American female beauty culture, this study must first traverse other African cultures from whence Africans were taken into the European slave trade, and subsequently explore the lives lived and created on plantations during the period of enslavement. As this work continues it will follow the previously mentioned trajectory by following a notion from Maulana Karenga where he expounds upon Ma'at and its relation to the aesthetic where he states,

...both beauty and righteousness or rightness were taught and meant as Maat. In fact, beauty and good are intimately linked in Kemet as well as other African cultures. For example, in Swahili, Zulu and ancient Egyptian, the words uzuri, ubuhle and nfrw mean both goodness and beauty for each culture respectively. Thus, conceptually, the aesthetic and moral are often linked and the good becomes beautiful as the beautiful is seen as good (88).

By developing an understanding of how notions of the beautiful and simultaneously goodness existed in certain African cultures before the Maafa, one can better understand how such concepts were subsequently transmitted, utilized, and persisted in America amongst Black women as beauty culture served as an ontological and ethical anchor²⁹ that facilitated the sacred, unique, and agency-producing beauty culture that now exists for Black women in America.

As a vast majority of Africans who were stolen and placed into chattel slavery in the United States were taken from West Africa, it is befitting to explore sacred representations and manifestations of beauty in relation to the women of West Africa and

²⁹ According to Karenga as cited in *The Encyclopedia of African Religions* “Maat was to the ancient Egyptians both ontological and ethical anchor, giving them a sense of security, confidence and potentiality... Maat was to the ancient Egyptians both ontological and ethical anchor, giving them a sense of security, confidence and potentiality”, the function of maat described here can also be observed in Black female identity formation and behavior (198).

hair. Prior to and during the European slave trade, a vast population of Africans being taken practiced the Yoruba faith. While this analysis will not divulge every aspect of Yoruba faith in relation to women, it does explore the hair as sacred in Yoruba culture³⁰. In efforts to understand the determination or regard of the hair as sacred amongst Africans who brought their beliefs to the Americas amidst the Maafa, this analysis will now explore practical considerations of hair (including styles and practices) in the assertion of hair as ritualistic and sacred. In Yoruba many believe that the head or *ori* is sacred as it is “the abode of an individual’s destiny, guiding force, and creativity,” according to Augustine Augwele in *The Symbolism and Communicative Contents of Dreadlocks in Yorubaland*. While it is a widely reported fact that hair - in the context of precolonial Africa and the diaspora of the past and present- communicates status, family and tribe affiliation, community standing, and more,³¹ there is not a great deal of attention given to how hair styles are transmitted or passed down between individuals as sacred artifacts and processes. As the African oral tradition of spoken words was the primary means of communicating traditions, standards, and other aspects of life, it is difficult to find a comprehensive guide to hairstyling and its duties, participants, and ritualistic factors in West African documentation before the Maafa. However, various

³⁰ Although there are several examples of hair or headdresses being part of sacred rituals, there are various mentions of headdresses being used in festivals that venerate the orisha Oshun. There is an example of this in *Africa and the Americas: Culture, Politics, and History* where the hair entry mentions that “The Ibo and Yoruba ritualize headdress in festivals to the river goddess”.

³¹ In *400 Years without a Comb* Willie Morrow asserts that “Hair...is the most personal attire the individual possesses. With hair, the individual demonstrates his or her social significance, philosophical preference, cultural legacy...In less complex societies, like the tribal societies of Africa, hair reflects age, clan, occupation, status, sex, and even mood” (17).

philosophies that exist at present in Africa in regard to hair, reflect traditional beliefs that were evidently passed on through generations. In “Gender and Hair Politics: An African Philosophical Analysis,” Sharon Omotoso proposes a philosophy of hair in Africa in which she asserts the following,

The philosophy of hair in Africa could be approached from four possible standpoints: Precolonial, colonial, postcolonial/neo-colonial and globalized standpoints perspectives. Precolonial Africa featured a philosophy of *occasionalism*. Being a highly religious continent, it was held that occasions and class should primarily determine hair styles or hair patterns; these are believed to be set by God; who ultimately design[s] seasons of joy and sorrow and solely decide[s] the one to come to His subjects” (11).

Africa before colonialism is the focus and Omotoso’s perspective and her comments therein provide a direct representation of the sacredness of hair, as (per her reference) hair styles and patterns were essentially determined by God. More specifically, one can recognize considerations of women as the groomed and groomer in charge of hair practices in precolonial Africa. Omotoso cites some of the traditional rules of hair in common amongst various tribes in precolonial Africa where she writes,

2. Two people are not allowed to braid a person’s hair at the same time. It could result in the death of one groomer. 3. Pregnant women should not braid others hair. 6. Women should not cut men's hair. 7. It is unlucky to thank the groomer. 8. Hair should not be combed or braided in the open. 9. Hair should be covered during menstruation, which is associated with the belief that the head is the closest to the divine God. Menstruation is considered an unclean period, so women cover their heads with scarves. 10. The person who braids hair performs it as both a ritual and a social service. The man or woman who braids does it as a social duty. No rewards are expected.

As hair braiding is emphasized throughout the traditional rules listed above and it is mentioned as a ritualistic practice and social service for which there is no compensation expected, the sacred nature of hair, specifically hair braiding is illuminated. The exploration of traditional values associated with hair in Africa before the Maafa emphasizes braiding as more than a popular marker of culture because it existed as an act

and style that manifested a connection to God. Similar to other sacred aspects of African culture, written accounts of hair rituals and how-to guides are scarce in reference to performing and wearing braided styles. The lack of hair ritual representation further emphasizes the sacred nature of braiding (which was vastly undocumented, likely for protection of the sacred). While traditional concepts, European recollections, and the markers of certain groups of people or status therein is heavily documented, an understanding of the sacred nature of hairstyling itself as presented here, creates the means through which an understanding of hair's importance as a tool for African women during the European slave trade and on plantations can be realized.

As observable within this work, Kemet is widely recognized as the origin of beauty culture and West Africa is revered for the significant hair styles and concepts generated therein, however, the epistemological bridge of discourse needs to be built in efforts to provide agency to African women in America and abroad today, and that is what the remainder of this work does in a Sankofa essence with constant reference to Africa as cosmological core. The seat of knowledge production in terms of beauty is indeed African and this work is seeking to engender that notion in the minds of African American women to further inscribe agency in one's concept of beauty. Asante concurs in a 2020 work entitled "Africology, Afrocentricity, and What Remains to Be Done," where he states,

A second approach is getting facts straight about knowledge production. The pyramid, the *mir*, is the fundamental basis for all modern curricula. It is not found in Greece but in Africa, in Kemet, called Egypt by the Greeks. The pyramid gives us biology, physiology, chemistry, monumental funerals, burial of the dead, and knowledge of the workings of the organs."

I add to the notion espoused by Molefi K. Asante, that the pyramids have also given us a sacred beauty culture that is worthy of distinction and carries a legacy worthy of continuation across space and time.

CHAPTER 4: TANGLED: DISCOURSE PRACTICES AND THE ORIGIN OF BEAUTY/ HAIR PRACTICES AND PLACE AS A TOOL OF RESISTANCE DURING ENSLAVEMENT (1520s-1865)

What current discourse illustrates is that regardless of different perspectives and preferences, beauty salons and beauty culture allow African women to experience agency and liberation through hair— a topic and corporeal element that has long been a site of oppression and contention by the Eurocentric forces. I can recall excitement as a girl when I heard women speak of workplace hair restrictions or when requests from spouses to wear their hair a certain way were described in lively animated quotes filled with voice modifications and bodily gestures. My excitement grew when I saw women leave with a totally different hair style than the one that was deemed permissible by their employer or that which was requested by their beaux. The resulting hair style and the journey to achieve it was themed by intention. Intentions for that hair appointment were set as women shared their narratives which were full of words and shifts in countenance to express the client and hair stylist's emotions toward the requests or rules that the client decided *not* to honor that day. As I watched my mother, watched other stylists, or at times as I myself draped clients in shampoo capes, towels, and neck strips before proceeding to the shampoo bowl, I mentally registered their decision to deny employer and intimate partner requests as a boss move, one where no one got to tell these women what to do, not even their literal employer. I consciously noted their actions as things I could do in womanhood to govern myself on my own terms, but I was unconscious of the fact that I was witnessing a lived testament to the tangles of resistance that function through African American women's beauty culture.

The African American woman's ability to subvert oppression in America through hair is grounded in the period of enslavement. The epistemology of many Africans during the period of enslavement was one that represented African cosmological concepts, African derived precepts, and an mixing with or incorporation of European cultural concepts that were imposed upon Africans as a means of control and capital production. For one to ever believe that Africans did not resist physical bondage and a life of servitude is to do an unspeakable disservice to African foremothers and forefathers responsible for the masses of Africans that hail from the United States; to remove functions of the corporeal body as a tool of resistance is almost sacrilege. A great deal of beauty culture during the period of enslavement amongst African women in America was created through law and policy reinterpretation which revealed a prowess amongst African people and remnants of culture. However, cultural continuity from the continent of Africa is responsible for many of the distinctive qualities that characterize acts of resistance through beauty that were performed by African women who were enslaved in America.

As the oppression of the era explored herein is chattel slavery and all of its ramifications, the inhumanity that this chapter discursively overturns is rather overt. Since the human existence of Africans was denied in enslavement, yet Africans asserted themselves despite their circumstances, it is important to locate this analytical period of beauty culture in Africa prior to moving into the period of enslavement because Africa was the last place where humanity went uncompromised before the European robbery of Africans. Moving backward teleologically from the Maafa, to West Africa, to Kemet, reveals the spiritual and communal aspect of beauty culture threads of continuity. Community involvement during beauty engagements is part of the metaphysical or

spiritual bridge that exists between African women on the continent prior to colonialism and African women who were enslaved in America. Epistemological and ontological continuity exists between African women from the continent who reflected an awareness and belief in goddesses who engaged with beauty culture, and enslaved African women in America who engaged in beauty activities. The aforementioned continuity added to the phenomena of African-centered sacred beauty culture and can be observed specifically in discussions of the orisha Oshun.

While the biological relationship between Africans of the continent and those who were taken into American slavery has been presented vastly, the kinship of Nigerians and African Americans is pertinent to the discussion of Oshun and Africana beauty culture. A July 2020 study report from *The American Journal of Human Genetics* entitled, “Genetic Consequences of the TransAtlantic [*sic*] Slave Trade in the Americas”, brings the Nigerian, Yoruba, and African American genetic connection to the fore where it reads “We considered current Atlantic African populations to be suitable proxies for past populations in Africa given limited migration and current population structure following a latitudinal gradient... Ancestry inference in the Americas reveals that the majority of individuals within the United States (93%) as well as from the British and French Caribbean (82%) tend to have ancestry from all four of these Atlantic African populations [Senegambian, Coastal West African, and Congolese], with Nigerian being the most common of the four.” The genetic connection cited in the “Genetic Consequences of the TransAtlantic [*sic*] Slave Trade in the Americas” study presents scientific knowledge that corresponds with Emma Dabiri’s citation of the orisha Oshun as

a skilled braider in her text, *Don't Touch My Hair*. Dabiri describes Oshun as a braider where she asserts,

Individual *orisha* have certain abilities and are charged with particular areas of responsibility. One of the most powerful of these *orisha* is the goddess of love and fertility, Oshun... Oshun is understood to be the primary and most skillful hairdresser in Yoruba mythology. A well-known *oriki* or poem of praise introduces her thus:

Oshun, embodiment of grace and beauty, The preeminent hair plaiter with the coral beaded comb

Given the importance hair is granted by means of its association with an individual's spiritual well-being, Oshun's relationship to hairdressing is no coincidence. In fact, in Yoruba culture, hair is of such significance that the earth itself is sometimes personified as a woman having her hair combed with farming hoes because hair is associated with spiritual well-being, no price is too high to pay for your hair.

Since hair is a communicative form itself, that reveals one's status, standing, community and spiritual affiliations in many African contexts, and Yoruba culture spread throughout Nigeria and beyond, Africans that traversed the Transatlantic slave trade and those that lived on plantations, were able to visually observe representation of Oshun within braided hair styles³². Within the multitude of braided variations, albeit individual plaits, cornrows, braided pigtails or ponytails, the spirit matter of beauty culture from Africa was transferred to America even though the Africans enslaved in America were not physically on the continent. Dabiri's inclusion of the *oriki* (a poem of praise) suggests that poems were recited, or songs were sung in veneration of Oshun. Such verbal recitation and veneration were likely to enable Africans during Transatlantic travel and those who existed on plantations to audibly observe the presence of Oshun as shared verbally by other Africans. The presence of Oshun in Yoruba culture and her title as a

³² There are several sources that discuss or represent Oshun and her hair, including stories of hair loss and cutting of her hair. Tharps and Byrd also write in *Hair Story*, "[b]oth male and female devotees of certain Yoruba gods and goddesses were required to keep their hair braided in a specific style" (4).

skilled hairdresser, the high percentage of Nigerians taken into enslavement in America, the presence and history of the Yoruba faith in Nigeria, and the notion that culture does not simply disappear from a person (even in the most horrid circumstances such as chattel slavery) collectively characterize the origin of African women's beauty culture in America as sacred material that was first engaged discursively through sight, verbal recitation, and hearing before written documentation occurred.

In the consideration of sight and sound as epistemological bridges of beauty culture between Africans of the continent and those in America during chattel slavery, it is important to note that the metaphysical aspects of culture are what allowed for such ways of knowing and determination of beauty culture as sacred along with subsequent use of it as a tool of resistance. As previously mentioned in a reference to Kimani Nehusi, culture does not simply leave a person amidst movement. Following Nehusi's idea that culture does endure modification, but it does not totally vanish or immediately move to the space of the unrecollected amidst human movement, this discussion of beauty culture during enslavement elevates Africanity in practices on and surrounding plantations where most Africans lived in America prior to the 20th century. On plantations and other lands where Africans lived or absconded from enslavement in America, culture still existed in the form of daily activities including performing labor, caring for one's physiological needs and that of others, in addition to a variety of micro and macro aggressive activities, such as work slowdowns that revolted against the institution of slavery. The maintenance of one's physical, spiritual, and mental faculties by African women on plantations functioned through the use of available means. By maintaining their sense of African culture through beauty culture and their minds, Africans were, in a literal sense, able to

be liberated from their plight as chattel for the American capitalistic economic system. The notion of cultural retention represents a fight against inhumanity which surpasses even the most grotesque ideologies and representations of racist imposition. Ferreira describes the aforementioned grounding process in the context of Afrocentric theory where she writes,

Conversely, I would say that when the Afrocentric paradigm and theory of knowledge grounds and supports Africanity, it produces the only true place of liberation for African people. Moreover, within this same functional dimension the Afrocentric philosophical paradigm proves to have the potential to liberate the human mind from the shackles of every form of toxic ideology (168).

As African bodies remained in bondage, some hair styles that can be analyzed discursively are covered heads (for example headwraps and scarves which will be differentiated here), braids, cornrows, and straightened styles. The methods of achievement, products used, location of grooming processes, and dawning of such styles became part of the cultural content that enslaved Africans in America contributed to beauty culture and passed on as components of resistance that founded the basis for Black hair, Black beauty culture, and Black beauty salons as vessels for the assertion of freedom amongst Black women.

While runaway advertisements were created for the purpose that lies antithetical to African American freedom, they are one of the most descriptive discursive sources on African women's beauty culture during enslavement. If one ever questions the relevance or validity of hair as a site of enslaved African women's resistance, the answer to such questions of relevance or the requested evidence for those who ask such questions is reflected in runaway advertisements. The abhorrence against African hair, similar to that which exists today is evidenced in the description of African hair treatment as opposed to

other material objects described in “A Survey of the Material Culture of Enslaved Black Women through Runaway Slave Advertisements” where Hope Wright writes,

A recounting of objects that was indeed specific, but usually without judgment. When describing the hair of these same women, however, there was a range, from subjective, patronizing, and derogatory to descriptive, detailed, and direct. Quite often the hair of these women in many ads was referred to as wool. *Lizzy* is described as having “a long wooly head” and *Hannah* had “remarkable long hair, or wool.” Hair and wool were synonymous, but many ads do refer to other characteristics of hair.

This study looks at the use of language alongside African beauty praxis during the period of enslavement to discover the roots of beauty culture’s liberatory capacity for African women in America. It is important to illuminate that African women were very likely to have devoted time to hair grooming considering the focus and attention to detail that was represented in the description of African people in runaway advertisement content. Although many enslaved Africans could not read, it is likely that the content of such advertisements still spread, enriching the Black beauty culture discourse of the time. Plantation owners may have only expected fear or admission of cooperation from enslaved Africans when conducting internal plantation investigations for the absconded African whereabouts. They may not have anticipated the spread of revolutionary information, however, as descriptions of said Africans who absconded or escaped from enslavement spread amongst others who remained on plantations, so did the hair styles of those women who decided to leave plantations in search of freedom. Successful escape from enslavement, regardless of length of time away or distance traveled from plantations, was a revolutionary action and the fleeing person’s hair arrangement was part of that radical narrative that breeched the control of the dominating class in the system of chattel slavery.

As Wright's work continues she writes, "The variety of textures and colors that existed in the descriptions of these runaways, in no way compared to the variety of hair styles that these women wore;" the element of style echoes reflections of not only hair grooming for survival (as many texts discuss the use of products to fight tinea capitis or ringworm) but also Ma'at in precolonial African cosmology, including spiritual veneration of Oshun and the quotidian practices of elaborate beautification in Kemet.

Similar sentiments can be reviewed when headwraps are analyzed as discursive text. The topic of headwrap use or head coverings within the period of enslavement is a topic characterized by dichotomy, as there are two dominant headwrap styles used in assertions of autonomy of the African woman's body in American slavery. The tignon headwrap exists as a subject of resistance and rebellion via reinterpretation of laws in New Orleans during the 18th century. In 1786 the tignon law³³ was enacted wherein African women in New Orleans, enslaved or free, had to wear their hair covered with scarf or handkerchief in efforts to reflect their status of belonging to lower class in the context of slavery's economic and social system. While the tignon laws were aimed at relegating the then growing mulatto population and freed population to that of a slave, African women of varying statuses reinterpreted the law as they "turned the tignons into statements, styling them also with jewels and feathers, and picking bright eye-catching fabrics" according to Rediet Tadele in the article for Amplify Africa website entitled "Tignon Law: Policing Black Women's Hair in the 18th Century" (Tadele).

³³ Information on the Tignon Law and other sumptuary laws imposed upon African women during enslavement is available via archival research in addition to sources including The National Park Service's Park Ethnography Program.

Turbans were another type of headwrap. PBS's "Slavery and the Making of America" series discusses turbans and head wraps in connection to Africa where the text reads,

African women wore head-wraps similar to those worn by their enslaved counterparts in America. For these women, the wrap, which varied in form from region to region, signified communal identity. At the same time, the particular appearance of an individual head-wrap was an expression of personal identity" (PBS).

Although many may disagree with the chronicling of the headwrap on the continent as if it only emerged out of slavery only, what becomes evident here is continuity and cultural retentions— which is yet another representation of freedom through African cultural expression within the institution of slavery. As African women reinterpreted laws and expressed their Africanity in wearing headwraps during the period of enslavement, the roots of a discursive African beauty culture community were planted; such solidification is reflected where the authors of "Slavery and the Making of America" write,

...the head-wrap also created community -- as an item shared by female slaves -- and individuality, as a thing unique to the wearer. Cassandra Stancil, enslaved in her youth, insisted that she never asked another woman how to tie her head-scarf. "I always figured I could do it," she said, "I could try and experiment and if not get that, get something that I liked."

In Cassandra's words freedoms enacted by enslaved African women that expressed and developed the fibers of community resound as do elements of a learning curve, or beauty culture through the epistemological methods of seeing and hearing.

The discussion of hair styles and headwraps gives way to a discussion of the methods and products used to achieve certain styles during enslavement and the location of grooming practices. In *Stylin': African American Expressive Culture, from Its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit*, Shane and Graham White present several scenes of hairstyling and grooming amongst enslaved Africans. White male onlookers such as

Benjamin Latrobe and Joseph Ingram described scenes of beauty practice in the 18th and 19th century American South. The work of Latrobe describes a scene in which African men were engaged in a three-person grooming session outdoors and the work of Ingram shares content wherein enslaved African men were observed shaving inside of their cabins and women were visually observed “arranging their frizzy hair” in a cabin or “*investigating* the condition of their children’s hair,” while the elders talked and smoked near the doors (37). Although the scenes mentioned previously, do not overtly show African men and women saying that they were engaging in beauty culture, the observed actions, when considered from an Afrocentric perspective, bring life to beauty culture during enslavement through the disclosure of grooming locations, description of parties involved, a reference to verbal communication, intergenerational engagement, and hair care as opposed to only styling. In *Hair Story* Ayana Byrd and Lori Tharps mention bacon grease, lye and potatoes, grease meant for wagon wheels, and strips of eel skin as materials or products used in grooming practices; each of the aforementioned materials represent a cultural modification to achieve beauty in hair based on products that were available to enslaved Africans (17). Byrd and Tharps also mention hair *training*, a term still used today³⁴ in Black beauty culture and many other areas of human rearing and development, where they write “Some slave mothers took to wrapping their children’s hair to start ‘training’ it as early as infancy” (17). While there is no physical salon mentioned by Shane and Graham White or Lori Tharps and Ayana Byrd, many of the

³⁴ At present the term *training* in African American women’s beauty culture refers to the condition of the hair through various means of manipulation or change over time in order to achieve a specific look, style, or outcome with ease and longevity or just for a sustained period. Drawn from my own professional knowledge, the provided definition of training can refer to styles that reflect curled or straightened styles.

discursive elements of the salon and beauty culture are rendered evident in the scenes and details they reference.

As there is not much overt content that focuses on marginalized people during the darkest hour of oppression in any context, the information about African women in America during enslavement regarding beauty culture and discourse is something that must be searched for deeply in order to understand the freedoms Black women express through hair in recent history and the present day. Additionally, one must realize that enslaved African women's knowledge and experience in beauty culture was primarily acquired through hearing and sight which still exists as primary means of knowledge acquisition for Black women engaged in African American beauty salons and culture. In mining archives, journals, locations, maps, and other sources of the African beauty culture in America, one is reminded of Asante's words from his groundbreaking text *Kemet, Afrocentricity and Knowledge* where he discusses direct and indirect data as he says,

a collection of data, for example, for an Afrocentric project will consider cognitive and material systems, direct and indirect data –gathering measures, myths, tape or video-recorded conversations, and unobtrusive acquisition processes based on the African culture... Knowledge relates ultimately to some human interests even if it is only to “see” the person who conceives of a problem (6).

Within this discussion of beauty culture amongst African women during enslavement in America, it is very important to *see* these women as much more than property. To *see* a woman who was considered a tool of capitalism, much like cattle and other livestock, as a person who cared about her hygiene, appearance, and metaphysical welfare even in such abject and wretched conditions, is a victorious feat in and of itself; to enable other women to do so in the name of beauty culture is a secondary part of the overall goal of

this work. Looking for a beauty culture discourse amongst enslaved African women in America may be difficult, arduous, and even pointless to some people, however, as an Afrocentric scholar, lifelong beauty culture participant, a proponent of agency for African women, this task of *seeing* our ancestral foremothers in the darkest annals of American history, is not only a labor of liberation but one of adulation, appreciation, and lust for a deeper knowledge of the connection Black women have to beauty culture and the salon which was further developed through 20th century discourse and culture.

1865 marked the victory of the Union over the Confederacy and freedom from physical bondage for over 4 million African people who had been enslaved in America. Without the constraints of physical bondage, African Americans had a great deal of matters to ponder and address, one of the matters being identity. How and what did African Americans wish to present about themselves? What was the intersection of community uplift and daily lived activities? What did racial uplift literally look like? As the rhetors of the abolitionist movement, which included males and females, such as Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman, evidenced the elocutionary abilities of African Americans during enslavement, the verbal aspects of freedom and the capability to communicate such had been set, but did African Americans wish to physically appear as many had during bondage or did people wish to shift the topic of political topics in speech (which included all aspects of African American identity which had just recently been both economic and political for 400 years) and in appearance? As sight and sound governed the means through which many Americans absorbed the content of African freedom in America (especially African Americans who were still largely illiterate to written communication) the images of freedom and recourse after enslavement, had to appear in the best interest

of community uplift, but who was behind the creation of that *look*? None other than fellow African Americans with a proclivity for the adornment of the physical. During the period of enslavement many African American men and women maintained their own physical grooming regularly and that of other Africans on the plantation in which they lived. On many plantations a select few men and women tended to the needs of whites, and in the North an even smaller number serviced whomever they pleased, as professional hair stylists prior to 1865. Such beauty professionals included Eliza Potter and the Remond sisters who owned Ladies Hairwork Salon and a beauty business that included “a wig factory and mail order tonic distribution center” (Gill 10). In existing literature based on both Potter and the Remond sisters, economic, social, and political freedoms are associated with the occupational identity of African American hair stylists during the period of enslavement. There is vast documentation that reflects the intentional nature of Madam Walker’s involvement in conversations about African American racial uplift, but how did she know or come to believe that she had the freedom to do so while standing on the platform of beauty culture? She may have seen or heard about the legacy of the Remond sisters, specifically Sarah Remond Putnam³⁵, an avid anti-slavery rhetor and an elder sibling to the three Remond sisters. She could have specifically heard of Caroline Remond Putnam. Caroline Remond Putnam was a supporter of women’s suffrage³⁶ who served as a salon proprietor, hair stylist, and

³⁵ Many of Sarah’s rhetorical works are available in a database maintained by the University of Detroit Mercy entitled the “Black Abolitionist Archive” within the UDM Libraries / Instructional Design Studio.

³⁶ Detailed information on the life and career of Caroline Remond Putnam is available via the blog *Streets of Salem* under the entry entitled “Caroline Remond Putnam”.

manufactured Mrs. Putnam's Medicated Hair Tonic which was intended to treat hair loss; since Walker was personally impacted by hair loss there is a possibility that knowledge of Caroline Remond Putnam could have motivated her entry into hair care. While the Remond sisters died in 1894 and 1908 respectively, their work was captured in newspapers of the time and other publications including an extension service advertisement³⁷. Walker could have also encountered Potter's autobiography entitled *A Hairdresser's Experience in High Life*, originally published in 1859, wherein Potter shared the following recollection of an engagement with white patrons in the South:

While combing two ladies, from Bigbury, who were in the habit of stopping at the St. Charles, I found them very angry, and, on inquiry, they said they owned hundreds of slaves, but would not sit at the table with negro drivers [*sic*] and negro-traders. I said, "Neither would I, madam, sit at the table with any such persons; even the Old Boy himself would not allow them a seat at his table; as I know well, neither in heaven nor on earth, nor yet in that unmentionable place, will soul-drivers or soul-traders ever have a comfortable place (14).

Potter's protests against the institution of enslavement while serving as a hair stylist, depict an anti-slavery political ideology that was expressed in several of Potter's interactions with both white and black people in America. In either case the prescribed categories of rhetoric as it refers to Africans in America, had already been disrupted by the intersections of politics and beauty culture prior to Madam C. J. Walker's entry into beauty culture. The work of Potter and the Remond sisters set the precedence for the community activism economic uplift and physical beauty work that became part and parcel of Madam C. J. Walker's empire and legacy as captured in discourse.

³⁷ The Remond's wig service advertisement is featured within the entry "Caroline Remond Putnam" featured on the *Streets of Salem* blog.

CHAPTER 5: BLESS THE WOMAN THAT’S GOT HER OWN: BRICK AND MORTAR AS GOD AND HAIR GROWERS DOMINATE THE CONVERSATION (1865 INCLUDED HERE BUT THE FOCUS IS ON 1919-1950)

In the summer of 2019, I traveled to one of the last standing Madam C.J. Walker museums located in the Sweet Auburn neighborhood in Atlanta, Georgia. During my one-on-one visit, I conversed with the owner and curator of the space, learned of its history, and held artifactual tools that were used by Madam C.J. Walker Beauty Shoppe employees. As I toured the quaint space that still smelled of hair products, and held the tools used by women in a time well before my existence, I felt a historical connection that felt like home. Perhaps it was because my intergenerational connection to beauty culture lies in the early twentieth century.

As the United States prosecuted Marcus Garvey in June of 1923, my maternal great-grandmother was days away from her fourth month of life. My great-grandmother shared stories of her youth in the South as a light-skinned girl with long hair which brought her both ridicule and pride. As she shared tales of hair length that one could sit on and unwanted haircuts by peers, her life stories as a girl in the South and her journey North as a young adult permitted me access to hearing and understanding the beauty culture that migrated from the South to the North with Black women at the turn of the 20th century. Our Southeast Washington, D.C. dwelling was my first memory of a home and it remained a place I visited on weekends routinely after moving to Maryland. It was also the first place I recall seeing hair grooming practices as my mother provided services in the first-floor kitchen area of our duplex home. That is the entry point of my intergenerational beauty perspective; the point at which the salon and home became synonymous. According to Doñela Wright’s homeplace theory,

Homeplace is a culturally conscious-elevating site of liberation and resistance, created and maintained by individual members within the African Diaspora. One's cultural consciousness dictates that through the use of one's indigenous culture and worldview, in addition to affirming that culture and worldview, the culturally conscious individual seeks and participates in ways to fight white supremacy, according to his/her individual's talents. In the process of creating homeplace and seeking ways to establish homeplace via Homeplace Theory, homeplace can be accessed and created by any individual within the Africana diaspora, which includes Africana women, Africana men, Africana children and the ancestors and unborn. As the African worldview is interrelated and functions in a cyclical manner, homeplace must also operate in a cyclical manner by including everyone in the creation and maintenance of it (41).

In accordance with Wright's assertion, the Black beauty salon and beauty culture have historically undergone cycles of change, but the engagement of the community has remained, thus validating beauty salon and culture associations with home and other domestic spaces. Through various activities and endeavors that often aligned with socialist perspectives that were popular among African Americans in the early 20th century, beauty culturists³⁸ sought to aid their communities aesthetically, physically, and politically. Such activism was complimented by a sacredness that came to be associated with the African American beauty industry. Early 20th century advertisements which often associated African American women's physical beauty with Christian ideas such as a woman's crown and glory³⁹ engendered sacredness into African American beauty culture discourse. The sacred characteristics of the community activism of industry practitioners and beauty advertisements that invoked Christian religious ethos expanded the realm of African American beauty from physical content to spiritual content in 20th century America. While many Black beauty practitioners of the early 20th century

³⁸ Term defined in Tiffany M. Gill's *Beauty Shop Politics: African American Women's Activism in the Beauty Industry*.

³⁹ Such advertisements are explored in Noliwe M. Rooks's *Hair Raising: Beauty, Culture, and African American Women*.

understood the importance of activism and the metaphysical significance of beauty culture, one of the most notable among them is Madam C.J. Walker.

Sarah Breedlove was born in 1867 on a Louisiana plantation, she died in 1919 as Madam C.J. Walker in her estate in New York. More than a century after her death, in the year 2021, Walker's legacy is still present and relevant as The Madam C. J. Walker Beauty Culture⁴⁰ product line is listed as "coming soon" in association with the beauty industry retailer, Sephora. In Madam Walker's lifetime and in a posthumous capacity, her legacy of economic and social impact is narrated as one of the greatest achievements by an African American to date, however her legacy was established during a time in which the terrain of beauty culture was unsettled amongst African Americans. This section centers the years 1919 through 1950 as seminal periods in African American consciousness, specifically regarding ideologies and actions toward African American uplift after emancipation. The New Negro Movement in which mass relocation and migration of African American bodies and minds took place, brought forth new or revised ideologies of racial uplift and various shifts in African American identity emerged. The turn of the 20th century brought intellectual debates over educational paths, the Black Protest Movement and the establishment of organizations devoted to such causes, the Harlem Renaissance and artistic expression and celebration therein, military integration post WWII, the integration of schools and national league sports, and an array of grand scale protests and boycotts aimed at creating legal change. Of initial significance

⁴⁰ It is important to note that Sephora's product line is "inspired by the life of Madam C.J. Walker" according to the MCJW company website. The existence of this line is relevant to this analysis because it represents continuous impact of Walker's legacy as captured in product names like "dream come true" which also add to Walker's legacy as captured in beauty discourse.

to this period of African American uplift ideologies and political consciousness in relation to beauty culture, is the symbol of the New Negro Woman, a concept that directly impacts and is impacted by Madam C.J. Walker.

When Walker entered the beauty industry the new woman concept was a topic discussed by various women and men who were leaders in the conversation for African American uplift. Walker entered the beauty industry in 1905, at a time when beauty advertisements employed derogatory terms to describe Black hair which fed into the sea of stereotypical caricatures like the Mammy and Topsy who were depicted with distinctive covered or standing hair throughout media⁴¹. Erstwhile, Black female leaders such as Nanny Helen Burroughs commented, “What every woman who bleaches and straightens out needs, is not her appearance changed, but her mind changed...if women will use half the time they spend on trying to get white, to get better, the race will move forward apace,” in a vehement expression of disdain toward beauty culture in 1904 (Blaine 66). Many female leaders like Mary Church Terrell, whose mother owned hair salons in the South and the North⁴², wore their hair in the popular pompadour style of the time which required hair straightening for many to accomplish said look; interestingly, Nannie Helen Burroughs also wore a pompadour. What stands out along with

⁴¹ Donald Bogle’s *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films* provides images and an in-depth discussion of these stereotypes. Ferris State University’s Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia collection provides visuals of the aforesaid stereotypes in context with several others.

⁴² Mary Church Terrell’s mother is said to have owned a “hair-saloon in Memphis and then in New York” according to an article entitled “Mary Church Terrell (1863-1954): A Black Woman Pioneer Historian: From the Margin to the Center Stage” by Fatma Ramandi. It was stated in “Lifting as Ae Climb: The Life of Mary Church Terrell” by Kendra Knisley that that the salons were for “elite white women”.

disgruntled comments from leaders in racial uplift ideology, is captured by Blaine who writes of Burroughs and Booker T. Washington,

Washington and Burroughs, for their part, would later change their minds...the intellectual paths these early opponents traveled, from opposition to acceptance, are significant...They reveal much about the ambivalence that underlay black beauty culture in the early twentieth century and the thin line that beauty culturists walked in denying charges that they straightened hair to help black women look white (67).

Although beauty culture during the New Negro Movement was themed by discursive contestation, what seems to win out in all of the debate and positionality, is the legacy of Madam Walker, one characterized by agency and ironically, little hair straightening.

Contrary to popular belief and reception, Madam C. J. Walker's legacy was not solely built upon hair straightening or a straightening apparatus like the hot comb. Madam C.J. Walker contributed a great deal to Black beauty culture epistemology by making the sights and sounds of African American beauty culture ubiquitous. What makes the Walker beauty culture legacy unique in comparison to many of her contemporaries and predecessors, is her contribution of intersectionality in beauty culture. The Walker brand uniquely blended community activism, diasporic engagement, linguistic changes, and intergenerational business dealings carried out by not only Walker but also the "more than 1000,000 people" she was said to have helped by 1914 through the beauty industry (Rooks 74). In the age when many African American women including Annie Turnbow Malone had amassed economic success, community recognition, and an industry name under the auspices of haircare products, Madam Walker entered. While she began selling Poro products for Malone, she initiated her own product development in 1905. Motivated by her own hair loss journey, and much like the Poro brand, Walker's first products were geared toward hair care, not hair straightening.

Her top-selling product was actually her Wonderful Hair Grower contrary to the frequent placement of her legacy in the straight hair debate of the day⁴³. As captured by a number of sources including Tiffany M Gill's *Beauty Shop Politics: African American Women's Activism in the Beauty Industry*, Madam Walker was deeply involved in the women's club movement and other organizations, even to the point of convincing early skeptic Booker T. Washington of the importance of beauty culture, so much so, that "by 1915, Walker's female-dominated profession was so respected that the NNBL [National Negro Business League] chose the 'beauty parlor business' as the theme of the 16th annual convention where Washington made his final convention appearance ... (Gill 24). Tuskegee also became the first of many collegiate institutions where The Walker Beauty Culture Method was taught for years, which represented not only educational advancement but also community activism (Gill 27). Walker's community activism also served to unite the African diaspora in a way that previous practitioners had not. Walker put a great deal of money into her advertisements, including those that reached Cuba and South America in 1917; although international dealings occurred amongst African people, Walker was a pioneer in doing so through beauty culture, thus spreading messages of freedom across space (Rooks 68). As beauty professionals like myself continue to push for the inclusion and recognition of beauty culture in academic spaces today, Madam Walker was ahead of her time in successfully taking such a leap. Madam Walker's foresight also extends into the linguistic changes that she brought into the industry as evidenced in many of her words that were captured in advertisements and

⁴³ According to the Smithsonian, The Madam C. J. Walker Wonderful Hair Grower was her top-selling product as stated in the caption for an image of the product which read a cost of 50 cents.

personal letters. As an overt statement against white imposition of beauty standards via culture terminology, Walker wrote to her business manager that she was upset by a *Post Dispatch* reporter's use of the terms *hair straightener* when quoting her (Gill 25).

Walker's products and advertisements subverted the straight hair debate and incorporated aspects of beauty that were more akin to African values regarding her collective consideration health, aesthetics, political activity.

Noliwe Rooks contextualizes one of Walker's most long-lasting impressions on beauty culture which is also ironically one of the most overlooked, where Rooks reads into a Walker advertisement and states the following,

Although this photograph was probably not taken specifically for advertising purposes, her choices are worthy of comment. The "before" photographs suggest that short hair interfered with Walker's sense of self-worth to the extent that she could not look the world (or here, the camera) in the eye. However, once Walker's hair has grown, she looks boldly into the camera. Hair growth has altered her sense of self. In this way, "before" and "after" take on ideological significance as Walker illustrates for readers that hair growth is key to feelings of defiance and resistance (70).

The look that Rooks contextualizes as defiant, resistant, and oppositional, is one of the elements that truly leaves its mark on the first half of the twentieth century. By shifting the look and what clients would see when encountering her before and after ad, Walker shifts the gaze that Black women could use within beauty culture; one in which straightening was no longer the topic, growth was, and once could look courageously into the eye of society with confidence in her hair. Through the work of Walker, women of the African American community were now able to look out into the world from the space of beauty culture albeit from a Walker salon, as a Walker agent, as a Walker student at one of the Madam C.J. Walker Schools of Beauty Culture, or as a patron of Madam Walker products. When looking as subject and no longer as object of white-

oriented assumptions about beauty culture, Black women engaged in an oppositional gaze through beauty; bell hooks characterizes that oppositional gaze as “an overwhelming longing to look of rebellious desire, and oppositional gaze. By courageously looking, we defiantly declared: ‘Not only will I stare. I want my look to change reality.’ Even in the worst circumstances of domination the ability to manipulate one's gaze in the face of structures of domination that would contain it, opens up the possibility of agency” (116). The aforementioned radical gaze associated with Madam Walker and her legacy did not die with her in 1919 because she established a massive workforce that allowed black women to see and be seen lavishly as free through beauty culture while serving the community. Madam Walker’s legacy and the associated radical gaze also continued after her death because she engaged in intergenerational beauty culture through her daughter A’lelia Walker (after whom she named her first beauty school, Lelia College of Beauty Culture, in 1908) and great-great granddaughter, A’lelia Bundles.

Part of what we unite over has to do not only with cultural continuity but over unified struggles against oppression, this notion is support it where Ferreira writes,

The distress to which Africans have been subjected through slavery and colonial exploitation as well as subsequent oppression and dehumanization throughout the western hemisphere has created an intellectual if not a spiritual unity in overturning the self-alienation, torture, and humiliation of the colonized subject. Thus, there has emerged a consciousness of a racial definition that could neither be accepted nor negated, one that tied an alienated identity to a revolutionizing self-affirming intellectual vitality in the process of regaining an existence denied, a human condition that *did not exist*. (Ferreira 74)

Post 1919, Black women continued to leave domestic jobs and venture into beauty for short periods or thereby creating lifelong careers. Per the overt political endeavors introduced by Walker into the industry, political and African-centered notions became inextricably linked to beauty service provision, especially through the work of

one of Walker's infamous agents and Lucille Campbell Green, who went on to marry Asa Phillip Randolph and engage in various socialist activities of which Tiffany Gill writes "it was the marriage of the socialist and socialite...that in many ways made A. Phillip Randolph's career and political activism possible," going as far as to enlist the financial support of A'lelia Bundles to support The Brotherhood of the Sleeping Car Porters (Gill 51). Throughout the 1920s the Walker legacy continued to thrive through A'lelia, who did not provide beauty services as a career but a hair salon in Harlem and ran the Dark Tower salon in Harlem wherein many notable artists of the Harlem Renaissance took part in celebrations of black culture and life. In the 1920s and 1930s major forces of oppression upon African Americans included discriminatory practices in politics, economics, and education, including segregation. As segregation in the military, schools, and national sports continued, it became clear that an array of grand scale protests and boycotts were aimed at inducing legal change.

As the 1930s continued and the woes of The Great Depression threatened the United States, Black beauty culture continued to be a hub of economic, personal, and professional agency for African American women. However, as regulation was passed to regulate the field of beauty culture, African Americans considered and incorporated means of maintaining their status in the beauty industry. As the mid 20th century emerged, the African American beauty culture industry extended international efforts and support of various causes. The cause of educational development and advancement was supported on an international scale by The United Beauty School Owners and Teachers Association when African American women affiliated with the organization traveled to Haiti and afforded 20 Haitian women scholarships to attend beauty school (Gill 88). The

Pan African initiatives executed by beauty culturalists exceed many other activists groups of their time as did their beauty salons and schools, which give credence to Guthrie P. Ramsey's notion that "Through these stories and memories we witness identity and community building in progress during the postwar years" (133). Within the stories and memories recounted by African American women regarding beauty salon experiences, one can observe the deployment of an epistemology in which Black women come to know more about, define more, and assert more regarding their identity and agency. As the transfer of knowledge and the making of or maintenance of beauty ensue, one can also bear witness to the construction and perpetuation of community. The notion of knowledge creation and community, though sacred, are not free of the profane- which is one of the many unique qualities of the salon. In alignment with African cosmological tenets, the salon environment and discourse reflect both the sacred and the profane, thus rendering the salon, the beauty school, and other locales where Africana beauty performance and discourse are central, as home spaces.

Sidney Mintz and Richard Price provide a definition of institutions that is pertinent to this chapter and to the duration of the analysis. According to Sidney Mintz and Richard Price's groundbreaking yet controversial text *The Birth of African-American Culture: An Anthropological Perspective*, an institution is:

any regular or orderly social interaction that acquires a normative character, and can hence be employed to meet recurrent needs...thus defined, the institutions which undergird and articulate a society differ greatly in their extent and nature (23).

While a beauty salon or other physical and metaphysical spaces of beauty culture may not be the quintessential or archetypal institution in the field of African Diasporic studies, it meets the definitive terms of the aforementioned definition. There is an abundance of

interactions and relationships established through African American beauty culture that have both spoken and unspoken norms which allow the space to meet beauty, hygiene, and psycho-social needs although the platforms may differ in extent and nature (i.e., within the salon, at trade shows, on the street, in the work place, etc.). As the work continues, Mintz and Price state characterize an institution as “a particular pattern for establishing friends, a particular economic relationship that is both normative and recurrent” (23). Within the African American beauty salon women establish friendships over services; practitioners and clients engage in a particular economic relationship when exchanging fees for services, purchasing beauty magazines, or making an effort to emulate the hair styles of celebrities who appear on internationally syndicated magazines, album covers, performances, and television shows (i.e. award shows, reality television shows, etc.); the foundation for such engagement and defining characteristics of the Black beauty salon were established in the first half of the 20th century. With the combination of needs being met and the establishment of relationships, African American beauty culture discourse born in the early 1900s is abounding with representations of a rhetorical selfhood and agency for Black women.

**CHAPTER 6: I'LL GIVE YOU SOMETHING TO TALK ABOUT: THE SALON
TRANSFORMATION TO A HUB FOR SOLIDARITY AND REFUGE AND
INDIVIDUALITY (1960-1980s)**

Walking contradiction, guess I'm factual and fiction
—Janelle Monáe, "I Like That"

The African American beauty salon is widely regarded as a sacred space. The characteristics of its sanctity are not identical to a church or even exactly like the barbershop, they are instead the things of magic steeped and represented in the reality of physical experiences and transformations, metaphysical shifts, and dialogic stories. The magical stories that take place in the salon, the very things we talk about in beauty culture and beauty spaces often originate in girlhood, per one's time spent in grooming sessions (albeit in salons, kitchens, on porches, etc.). Since the latter 20th century, media outlets have captured both the glory and agony of hair manipulations through Black women's storytelling, advertisements, film, etc., but some of the most authentic memories of beauty culture are capture in girlhood. My intergenerational connection to the 1960s through the 1980s comes from my mother and grandmother's beauty stories from their youth. The stories of my foremothers are filled with moments of individuality, refuge, and solidarity which also characterizes a great deal of the outward manifestations of the salon in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. My grandmother entered the industry as a teen in the 1960s when her brother began to pay her to maintain the hair of his daughters. Shortly thereafter, my grandmother's clientele of two people extended to her becoming the stylist to a majority of her family members and those family member's friends. My mother peered into the industry by watching my grandmother in the 1970s and has shared her quintessential story of a common act that many African American girls have done after the imposition of Eurocentric beauty ideals-she frequently engaged in fantasy acts

where she pretended a wrapped towel was long hair. These narratives of fiction and nonfiction categorization are the entry point to this chapter because the 30-year span covered herein includes a unique period of vocalized freedom in beauty culture, one dictated by the realities of the United States at the mid to late twentieth century and nonfiction dreams for the future. Within the 30-year time frame of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, an identifiable relationship between national politics, popular culture, and beauty culture emerged, with the late 1960s to late 1970s being especially notable in the establishments of symbolic beauty tools of resistance.

Though there are remarkable differences in the decades between 1960 and 1989, the oppressive elements were consistent in most regards. The oppressive elements of the era for African Americans included war, discrimination and injustice in: politics, economics, and education, restrictions and misrepresentation in the areas of performative and visual art, HIV and AIDS, drug, and looming threats from governmental and socially independent organizations. Prior to 1960 beauty culture had been solidified as an economic topic, a site of internal cultural debate. However, the 1960s introduced a renewed focus on developing an aesthetics of consciousness; the latter 1960s and early 1970s screamed revolution; and the 1980s responded with a period of renewed, relaxed rhetoric— all the while beauty culture and the salon captured the mental and physical shifts therein. Within the 30-year time frame of the 1960s to the 1980s, the visual aspects and sounds of beauty culture went through a myriad of changes, but the overall era was unique in its introduction of more learning styles wherein African American women could access knowledge of freedom through beauty culture.

A unique moment in African-centered thought emerged in the 1960s; one marked by a very unique shift in hair as a tool and component in political aesthetics. As the 1950s revealed progress in the area of integration, 1960s beauty salons and hair mirrored the same. Straightened pinup styles like the beehive, wigs, and partial extensions were central in the representation of African American women that filled advertisements and movie screens. Simultaneously, college students became represented in mass numbers within the fight against Jim Crow, wearing subtle pinups, straightened hair (sometimes pulled back), or tightly-formed croquignole curled styles amidst organized protests, like that of students involved with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). An artistic example of the 1950s to early 1960s shift is represented in Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*. Moving beyond the overt integrationist themes in the award-winning Broadway play, Beneatha's haircut and Afrocentric shift, employed beauty culture as a bridge to reflect the visual shift that was occurring in the last quarter of the century. The article "Splitting Hairs: How One Cut Changed A Raisin in The Sun" eloquently analyzes the content and context of the cut literally and symbolically, where the author Abbie writes,

Robert Nemiroff states in his introduction to the 1986 Vintage Books edition that a scene where [20-year-old] Beneatha unveils her shorn, natural hair, was edited out of *Raisin's* first Broadway run. Nemiroff claims this was due to the "unflattering" nature the actress's haircut...Yet another reason cannot be ignored. Black hair, specifically black women's hair, was and continues to be a highly personal and political aspect of the African American community...The politics behind the decision to wear one's hair "natural" had not previously been explored in a major Broadway play. There is nothing universal about black women's hair and the conversations surrounding it. The long history of black women feeling pressure to "tame" their hair, through chemicals and heat, would have been understood instantly by black audiences, while possibly leaving white audience members indifferent or confused.

As artistic work like *A Raisin in the Sun* tested the waters of freedom through beauty culture, as audiences, both Black and white, were getting a peek into the radical change and haircuts that would enter the eye of the American public through continued protests in the 1960s. As mainstream media captured the encounters of students of SNCC, members of the NAACP, and others being barraged and assaulted during protests, to the point of women having their hair drenched with food amongst other grotesque acts, many people's dispositions shifted toward more radical sentiments and one of the most notable shifts in thought was reflected in hair style changes.

With the spread of radical ideas and the rise of people like Malcom X, many male supporters cut their processed hair (primarily conks and artificial coloring) and women abandoned extensions. During the 1960s there was a clear visual representation of solidarity with a longing and a demand for recognition of African roots amongst black people in America. Although the bodies of many African Americans remained in the United States in the 1960s there were multitudes of Black people who were mentally in a sea of pride location in Africa. As the consciousness of African Americans rose higher, aesthetics documented that shift, especially hair. One was now able to look at an African American, and through semiotics, the looker could often *see* where a Black man or woman was coming from, as in their mental location. Ferreira explains the notion of location in knowledge production where she writes,

What the Afrocentric perspective on knowledge requires is location: African location as the methodological approach to African traditions and cultures while refusing the subaltern place that has always been conferred to Black expressions, artistic and cultural, by Eurocentric scholars...As a cultural theory Afrocentricity is committed to the reclamation of ancient African classical civilizations as the

place for interpreting and understanding the history of African peoples, narratives, myths, spirituality, and cosmogonies. (Ferreira 3)

Ferreira's perspective is pertinent to 1960s Black beauty culture discourse because for the first time in mass numbers within the United States, African descended people were conducting their lives in an African way while revolting against white domination.

Within the pursuit and enforcement of amendment rights by African Americans throughout the mid to late 20th century, many strides were made, and a great deal of African American powerful discourse emerged (i.e., the Black Power Movement, Black Arts Movement, Hip-Hop music, etc.). The aforesaid discourse was widely created and developed by African American community and political organizations that were focused on cultural development and uplift emerged. Like many groups of humans, some of the prominent organizations geared toward African American uplift in the mid to late 20th century faced internal issues. Gender was a central aspect in some of the internal issues that impacted such organizations contrary to the face of solidarity between men and women in many Black political organizations of the 1960s. As some women who were part of prominent Black organizations experienced unpleasant treatment and adversities within their groups, redress was often a difficult or complex feat. Contrary to the norm of 21st century America, wherein support of African women can be discovered amidst some popular female-centric ideology, feminism in America in the 20th century—which was largely white in ideology, focus, and representation—was not very inclusive of Black women. Thus, feminist elements often times were not in place within Black political organizations because essentially, the *fight* was different. Black women's fight was intersectional. While there was The East, the US Organization, and the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, there was also The Combahee River Collective which developed

the first iteration of intersectional perspectives regarding Black women and sought to elevate consciousness. The Combahee River Collective Statement of 1977 explored many aspects of Black female identity and one of their most overtly stated contributions—identity politics—is discussed in depth where the document states,

We believe that the most profound and potentially most radical politics come directly out of our own identity, as opposed to working to end somebody else's oppression. In the case of Black women this is a particularly repugnant, dangerous, threatening, and therefore revolutionary concept because it is obvious from looking at all the political movements that have preceded us that anyone is more worthy of liberation than ourselves. We reject pedestals, queenhood, and walking ten paces behind [*sic*]. To be recognized as human, levelly human, is enough.

The notion that change is derived from exploring one's own oppression is significant to a general exploration of the 1970s and the years immediately before and after the publication of The Combahee River Collective Statement of 1977. The 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s were decades that included representations of heightened consciousness among African Americans as reflected in hair and beauty culture. One of those highpoints was during the year 1969, when the first Miss Black America pageant was held. While the Miss Black America pageant reflects a heightened consciousness among African Americans due to the centrality of African beauty standards, the existence of the pageant itself reveals the shortcomings of popular American concepts of beauty. Many white American beauty competitions would not accept Black competitors or refused to crown Black women as winners; such actions were part of a binary that has existed throughout

American history wherein Black women are treated as the opposite of beauty and femininity. Ferreira captures the nature of binary concepts that exist widely in westernized societies and provides context for the liberation that can manifest when the perspectives of Black women are central where she writes,

Placing African-American women in the center of analysis not only reveals much-needed information about Black women's experiences but also questions Eurocentric masculinist perspectives on family. [(Collins, 1990: 222)] Under the ideological and philosophical construction of Western thought, human beings fall into the Western dichotomy of the binary oppositions of body and mind, male and female, individual and community. This is a conceptual framework of power in order to establish hierarchies, since the way difference is approached, and inequality is constructed depend mainly upon the mind-set of the one who has the power to impose his or her definitions. (135)

The definitions of power, mindset, community, and liberty as cited in white feminism were very much binary concepts at the time—women and men. Although the rationale and efforts of white feminism were valuable to the lives of many white women, it missed the mark for African American women. Thus, just as politically symbolic as the Black Panther aesthetic was -inclusive of an Afro hair style, a black beret hat, and black clothing- so was that of Angela Davis, whose Afro hair image is more widespread and symbolic than many of the era.

The Afro was a style largely managed at home, although some still visited the salon for Afro care and in the management of other styles. Considering the meeting of multiple styles and perspectives, the salon also became a location where women were able to voice differing opinions through the freedom of hair. In the salon, much like other safe spaces where African Americans dwell, conversations remain private as not to desecrate the feeling of safety for participants, thus it is nearly impossible to discover confounded research representing the exact dialogue of disagreements. However, the balance of the salon is maintained through the presence of the sacred and the profane,

including disagreements which occur but are often recounted in anecdotal stories that do not share much dialogue. Internal salon disagreements are an issue that I have heard much about from secondary grandmothers and other elders in the salon who lived through the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. Although the following occurrence captured in a short story did not take place in a 1960s to 1980s salon or the discourse of that era, it captures, in an almost anecdotal manner, the roles that take center stage when conflict emerges in the salon; in “Beauty Parlor Politics” Robin Boylorn writes,

A recent visit to the hair salon resulted in misunderstanding and maliciousness. I learned, after returning for my next appointment, that upon my exit I had been verbally assaulted by another Black woman... I was warned, when I returned to the salon, that an unnamed Black woman had asked “who I thought I was,” and then announced her intention to “get me in trouble” on my job for things I said in the salon...My stylist was apologetic and concerned as she explained what happened. “I confronted her when she said that,” she said. “It upset me that she came in here and wanted to get you in trouble...” I was, however, bothered by the audacity and nerve of a Black woman to enter the sacred space of the beauty shop with the intention of causing harm to another Black woman. This encounter, the first I have had in a salon, disrupted my narrative of support and jeopardized the ethic of care I had come to expect (and need)... (156)

Boylorn’s discussion provides context to not only one woman’s routine experience in the Black beauty salon but also further situates the space of the beauty salon as sacred, unique, a sensory experience, profane, varying, and important. Boylorn briefly analyzes the communication in the salon without sharing all of the details of the dialogue content, which further reflects and inscribes value. With Boylorn’s disclosure of an adverse interaction, what many may focus on is the offended and revenge-seeking woman’s motivation for reprisal and how that demonstrates a quality that can further separate African American women. However, to the African American woman that understands communities of sisterhood, one may observe something much different, transformative,

and powerful in Boylorn's story. It is within the response of Boylorn's stylist and herself to the vengeful woman's transgressions that one can observe the rules, both spoken, and unspoken in Black beauty salons. The stylist's ability and decision to "check" the woman for her threat to Boylorn and her apology to Boylorn along with Boylorn's shock at the woman's antics where she writes, "I was, however, bothered by the audacity and nerve of a Black woman to enter the sacred space of the beauty shop with the intention of causing harm to another Black woman" exemplify the power of discourse in the salon, specifically agency, personhood, rules, and recourse (156). Although the fate of that threatening woman remains unknown in Boylorn's text, what is quite evident is that she violated a sacred space, yet the space remained as such without shaking or breaking, as reflected in Boylorn's conclusion in which she writes,

Every two weeks, I will continue to make my way back to the salon. When I open the door I will be greeted with the warmth and welcome that radiates from the women who are already there. In a world that despises Black women, I refuse to give up the necessary experience of sharing intimate space and time with Black women despite the possibility I will encounter someone who means me no good. Beauty parlors are spaces of Blackwomanlove [sic]at its finest! (156)".

Contrary to various adverse experiences shared on social media, reflected in films that tear at the fabric of the Black woman's beauty salon as a sacred space, and various other attempts to ruin, desecrate, or invalidate the beauty salon as a sacred space for Black women, there are African American women who value, protect, uphold, and continue to cultivate the salon as a sacred space-and that safety is often reflected in discourse.

The political consciousness reflected in Black beauty culture of the 1960s and 1970s has many contrasting aspects to that of the 1980s. Many scholars discuss the decrease in political consciousness represented in hair in the 1980s, however, from a

professional and intellectual perspective, I regard the era as one of great creativity and unadulterated expression. Ironically present-day representations of the 1980s salon actually tear at the fabric of the creativity that existed in said spaces because they often miss the ubiquitous nature of the salon, only relegating it to four walls that were frequently impacted by middle class norms of arrival or the abhorrent impacts of the crack epidemic, Reaganomics, and violence. While the definition of an institution as espoused by Mintz and Price has been discussed in Chapter 5, the dynamics of the beauty salon as a discursive space and institution underwent noteworthy change in the 1980s. The characteristics of Black beauty salons during the 1980s differed from the African American institutions that were established during the period of enslavement and those that continued into the early twentieth century. By the 1980s, the African American beauty salon and larger haircare industry had solidified itself as a leader in Black industry and it began to expand. According to the 1987 publication, *A Common Black Destiny: Blacks and American Society*, “black businesses have grown faster than the nation's business sector as a whole— 7 percent compared with 5 percent. They have also become less dependent on black consumers by expanding outside traditional black consumer markets” (181). In addition to the comment on growth and market widening, it is also important to note that *A Common Black Destiny: Blacks and American Society* by Gerald David Jaynes and Robin M. Williams also mentions a 1944 study from Joseph Pierce that listed “beauty parlors” as a dominant firm but the author also notes that in the 25 years following 1944 (until 1969) that many other studies of the like occurred and further notes that,

these businesses were heavily, almost exclusively, dependent on the segregated black community for patronage. The poverty and small resources of that

community necessarily meant that black firms were at a great commercial disadvantage. Black-operated firms had little growth potential and poor access to credit (Harris 1936). Despite these conditions, the segregated economy was able to support a small number of successful enterprises and industries in which [white-owned] firms had not been motivated to compete for black business. Among these were the banking and life insurance industries, hair care products, and the mass media (180).

What I wish to add to the aforementioned notion from Williams and Jaynes is beauty salons. All of the words captured by Williams and Jaynes illustrate an institution that weathered storms and persevered because of and in support of its very own black community. This notion is important when exploring ideologies that exist within institutions as part of an overall epistemology; in the context of beauty salons discourse like conversations, advertisements, and hair styles, all served to introduce and promote ideologies. Ferreira asserts that “Ideology is institutional first and foremost and only later on to be considered a matter of consciousness. (Jameson, 2001: xii) ... subjects who work as reflections of the symbolic order become objects under the subjugation of this same ideology” (159). Ferreira’s words highlight the importance of looking at meaning of ideology in beauty by exploring the salon as an institution. Subsequently, she complicates the aforementioned notion as she poses a series of questions on ideology, then suggests Afrocentricity as an epistemological framework for avoiding inhumane institutional practices and ideology, where she writes,

If we are ideology (Althusser, 2001) how much of inhumanness is left in a human being with which she or he may transcend the inhumanity of the ideology, as Lyotard (2007) calls it? Is there a way out of ideology? Resistance. Struggle. Action/agency has to be taken drawing on the “miserable and admirable indetermination from which [the soul] was born and does not cease to be born—which is to say, with the other inhuman” (Lyotard, 2007: 7) ... The ideological subject has the ability to unmask the oppressive ways of ideology. We can revolt and change the institutional practices... (161).

Agency becomes available once one recognizes the flaw in ideology. For years Black women have used or employed beauty culture in a way that has indeed unmasked or

revealed the imposing nature of ideologies, especially those associated with racism and sexism in America. Since this work does not focus on whiteness it is important to contextualize the revolution in practices of beauty culture as acts that function to free African people from injustice. The era of the 1960s through the 1980s is not the only space where it is evident that revolutionary actions and decisions expressed via Black beauty culture were widely fulfilled on the basis of an African woman's consciousness as opposed to a desire to appease or mimic white perspectives. Occurrences during the period of enslavement, the symbol of the Afro beginning in the mid 20th century, and various forms of litigation in the present day such as The CROWN Act reflect times when revolutionary acts of beauty were carried out by African women in America on the basis of internal consciousness and not a desire for white acceptance or white assimilation. Toni Morrison's idea of definitions belonging to the definers is presented in the beginning of this work and is incorporated into this chapter because her notion allows for the development of new understandings and meanings in Black life including beauty culture. By disregarding imposed definitions and defining oneself, Black women involved with African American beauty culture are participants in an institution that is borderline ahistorical since so much has been seemingly defined by white patriarchal society.

CHAPTER 7: IT'S ABOUT MAINTENANCE: A STEADY FLOW IN INDUSTRY, SALON ATTENDANCE, AND STYLE CATEGORIES (1990-2000)

Look at where you be in, hair weaves like Europeans, fake nails done by Koreans
—Lauryn Hill, “Doo Wop: That Thing”

The aromas of oil sheen, Pink Moisturizer, an ice cream pail turned barrette jar, the feeling of my body lying across the cold kitchen counter where warm water ran against my scalp for a shampoo, and the cold giggling texture of gel—used for everything from finger waves to baby hairs—narrate my initial introduction to beauty culture beginning in the early 1990s. Beauty culture is indelibly printed on my brain because my mother had already begun providing hair services prior to my birth and she had my older sister’s hair (which we affectionately called Rudy Huxtable hair for its volume and density) to care for. I experienced the in-home salon, the cosmetology school, Black-owned beauty supply stores, Asian-owned beauty supply stores, Black-owned nail salons, and Asian-owned nail salons on more occasions than I can count before the age of 10. As the oppressive issues of drugs, mass incarceration, inadequate healthcare, police brutality, and attacks on Black creative expression themed the 1990s, I bore witness to an undeniable autonomy amongst Black women through beauty culture, one characterized by open and frequent engagements with beauty culture and the salon.

In 1990, the year of my birth, Carole Anne-Marie Gist became the first African American woman to win Miss USA and Sharon Pratt Kelly became the first Black female mayor of D.C., rhetorically placing Black women at the helm of the American image of beauty and democracy. Simultaneously, as African American female representation increased in politics, pageantry, television, and more, inhumanity persisted in the areas of justice (the police beating of Rodney King) and healthcare. Amidst the swarms of finger

waves, crimps, and curls, healthcare topics that were prevalent in African American beauty culture were breast cancer and HIV/AIDS. Considering the oppressive experimental nature of Black women's treatment in health and medicine, like that of enslaved women per the gynecological exploits performed by James Marion Sims or the involuntary use of Henrietta Lacks's cervical cells upon her death from cervical cancer, health care has induced fear for many African American women throughout the course of American history. However, through the activism of the salon, African American women in the 1990s were able to look physical healthcare in the face and boldly, sovereignly address medical issues which represented a habitual area of oppression for Black women. According to the Centers for Disease Control, the elapsed year of 1989-1990 represented "the first time, the number of new infections among African Americans exceed[ed] the number of infections in whites and remains that way ever since" and by 1993, it has become the "second leading cause of death for African American women in the age range of 25-30 (1). With the spirit of activism deeply engrained into the marrow of Black beauty salon and practitioner tradition, many African American professionals loaned their skills and spaces to HIV/AIDS education and prevention. The short documentary *Diana's Hair Ego: AIDS Info Upfront*, released in 1990, chronicles a collaborative effort from South Carolina hair stylist DiAna DiAna [*sic*] and public health educator Bambi Sumpter who provided AIDS prevention education through Diana's salon and their collaborative project, South Carolina AIDS Education Network⁴⁴. Tiffany Gill's *Beauty*

⁴⁴ *Women Make Movies* features, purchase, review and even virtual screening options for the film. The still shoots featured by the organization capture some of the authentic interactions between Black women convened for the causes of beautification, education, and health improvement.

Shop Politics: African American Women's Activism in the Beauty Industry, captures an array of HIV/AIDS, breast cancer, and other health and wellness programs initiated or running in collaboration with Black beauticians in the 1990s and ones that followed in the millennium, including, the Black Beauticians Health Promotion Program—a collaborative effort with The University of California San Diego Morris Cancer Center where black women's knowledge of diabetes, cancer, cardiovascular disease, and heart disease were surveyed in salons— and the Stay Beautiful Stay Alive program in which Black salons became screening locations for cervical and breast cancer (132). In a 2018 interview, filmmaker Ellen Spiro reflects on documenting *Diana's Hair Ego* and shares a telling sentiment from DiAna DiAna [*sic*], that illuminates the significance of the Black beauty culture and salons in health care, where Spiro stated, “Diana had the [hands-on] personal knowledge of what she was hearing from her clients. She said, ‘I’m like the priest[,] people confess everything to me.’ She knew exactly what kind of sex people were having and she knew certain sex was not safe and that people could potentially die” (Alternate Endings, Radical Beginnings Video & Artist Statement: Cheryl Dunye & Ellen Spiro). Hearing is reified as a tool in the liberatory function of salon epistemology through Spiro’s statement, and in her quote of DiAna DiAna. As DiAna DiAna likens herself to a priest, the action she took and displayed for the sake of the uplift of her clients as they shared personal information, demonstrates a connection to the African concept of a priest or priestess. The roles of a priest or priestess in an African historical context denotes a level of connection and responsibility that differs from Eurocentric norms which are pervasive in America; that difference is reflected in *The Encyclopedia of African Religion* where Asante writes,

African societies recognize priests and priestesses just as the ancients along the Nile had men and women performing in the great temples... The priests in other parts of Africa saw themselves not just as the keepers of the gods, but as the keepers of the people. When people needed support from their spiritual leaders, they found that support in the work of the priests...one had to be trained to serve the role of priest or priestess, and this remains the case. A person selected for the role is required to know all of the formulaic prayers, the moral and ethical behaviors of the priesthood, the taboos of the societies, the history of the community, the roles and duties of each individual, and the general philosophy of cleanliness.

DiAna DiAna served her people and decided to go beyond the prescribed areas of her cosmetology training for the benefit of her community. While aware of her clients' personal matters albeit *ethical*, *taboo*, or *historical* DiAna DiAna strived to help maintain their sexual and physical health or *cleanliness*, thus, her quoted simile is a reality when engaged from an Afrocentric perspective.

Seeing and hearing about such significant health care work in Black beauty culture has resulted in an abundance of such studies from scholars in present day, who like myself were likely young girls hearing of such efforts while spinning around in a salon chair. As the 1990s continued, so did Black women's concern with health matters, including physical health. I recall hearing about Tae Bo while admiring my mother and her girlfriends as they styled hair and applied cosmetics in preparation for a night on the town. I also witnessed women visit my mom in hair school while she was a student, then in her small in-home laundry room beauty studio, and later in an in-mall salon, after they had sweated out a hair style following a Tae Bo video session, a night out dancing, or other physical activities. I also recall sharing in sadness with my friends who could not get their hair wet while attending pool parties my mother threw for my older sister and I. Those visual and audio encounters became part of my understanding of Black women and risks associated with exercise. Although the issue is not resolved yet, the agency of

Black women's physical health as engendered by the health activism work associated with beauty culture of the 1990s, planted seeds that can resolve the compound exercise and hair-maintenance issue that many Black women are faced with today. In "Centering Perspectives on Black Women, Hair Politics, and Physical Activity", Shellae Versey discusses the potential of the salon to resolve the exercise and hair-maintenance issue among African American women where she writes,

Other community institutions, such as hair salons, provide an equally promising source of support for combining hair and strategies for exercise. Studies have shown that training salon stylists as lay health professionals can be an effective tool for health promotion and information dissemination.^{54–56}*[sic]* Engaging salons and hair stylists in a dialogue about hair and exercise may provide emotional support, as well as a platform for Black women and stylists to communicate about feasible options for maintaining hair styles that are amendable to intense exercise. Hair stylists can also provide clients with tangible support, in the form of tools and techniques for exercising and managing hair styles between salon visits (812).

As Versey continues she provides urgency to the need to activate our salon-provided health agency even earlier, if not for our own welfare as adults, then for the sake of Black girls, a topic in which I have demonstrated my knowledge of the compromises associated with maintaining a hair style; Versey writes,

Several studies note that Black women are often socialized during childhood to avoid sports or activities, citing hair as a primary reason.^{37–39} *[sic]* In fact, Boyington et al. found that, among African American adolescent girls, popular beliefs about an active lifestyle included notions of a 'beauty cost' that exercise is likely to mess up hair and makeup.⁴⁰(p5) *[sic]* Hair was often used as a rationale to justify not participating in organized school activities (e.g., recess or physical education) because of insufficient time to reconstruct a groomed appearance (811).

Compromises are just one motif in Black beauty culture that can be reframed intergenerationally, for African American girls and women alike, in effort to activate the agency afforded in Black beauty culture.

Beauty culture motifs existed vastly within media in the 1990s, specifically in television, music, and film. As Black sitcoms, neo soul music, and independent films emerged in the 1990s they brought with them an influx of hair styles and prominent hair stylists that represented the recurrent ideas of Black Power, Black Feminism, Africana Womanism, and Pan Africanism. African American women wore box braids (singer Janet Jackson), multicolored hair styles from blonde to blue (Mary J. Blige and Lil Kim) pixie braids (singer Brandy), French rolls, artistic arrangements of baby hair, pixie haircuts and bowl cuts (Halle Berry, Toni Braxton, T-Boz), locs (Lauryn Hill), straight styles with a swooped or curled bang (Aaliyah and Left Eye), and a variety of changing natural hair styles (Erykah Badu). As I saw the aforementioned hair styles and a multitude of variations of those styles, I wanted to change my hair to be like those I saw in my local area and in media; my mother was extremely willing to create my desired hair style as a cosmetology student herself at the time⁴⁵. In television shows like *Moesha*, *Sister, Sister*, and *Living Single*—where Kim Field’s character Regine Hunter and Queen Latifah’s Khadijah James equally spoke to me—Black women were central characters who wore various styles of natural curls, straightened hair, extensions, and braids. Other sitcoms like *Martin* resonated with audiences through the plot, cast, and many characters, especially Sheneneh Jenkins. While I hated being called Sheneneh in elementary school, per my actual name being Shané and the comedic aspect of the former’s characterization, I always enjoyed the show and as I aged, I came to admire the style, leadership, fearlessness, and entrepreneurship represented in the character Sheneneh. Sheneneh and

⁴⁵ *ESSENCE* magazine frequently highlights African American women’s hair. Many of the styles cited above were mentioned in a 2015 article entitled “Black History Month: Top Black Hair Moments of All Time”.

her Sho' Nuff' salon reflected nails, hair, makeup, fashion, and dialogue that were familiar to me through Black beauty culture. The narrative and on-screen presence of those women was captivating as they reflected the lived experiences of Black women and girls living amongst predominately Black populations in the 1990s which echoed stories I heard in the salon. The communal spirit of Africana Womanism, especially Clenora Hudson Weems's notion that "Admittedly, the Africana womanist does not have the luxury of centering just herself as victim in society when the victimization of her entire community is at stake. She realizes that her individual safety, her struggle for survival, are interconnected with the overall status of her community. Hence, the idea that until her entire people are free, she is not free, was represented not only in television at the time but also political activities (39). One example was the Million Women's March in Philadelphia in 1997 constituted "the largest gathering of women in the history of the nation" according to Molefi K. Asante in *The African American People: A Global History* (Asante 308). The rise in social consciousness as represented in the episodes of the previously mentioned sitcoms and the Million Women's March was often represented in hair, including that of characters-such as the cartoon image of a woman with a distinctive hair style that appeared on my grandmother's souvenir sweatshirt from the march- and various photographs of that momentous day. As Black Power, Black Feminism, Africana Womanism, and Pan Africanism were present in the speeches at the march (which included speeches given by Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, Representative Maxine Waters, and Sister Souljah), such notions could also be felt behind the chair, as African American women took the once thought "below the line labor" occupation of cosmetologist to Hollywood (Peña Ovalle). While they are not the first African

American women to do celebrity hair, Anu Prestonia, Kimberly Kimble, and Lisa Price were behind some of the most recognizable and politically functioning looks of the 1990s. Anu Prestonia a practitioner and the owner of Khamit Kinks has serviced several celebrity clients including Queen Latifah, Angela Bassett, and Oprah Winfrey, according to the Black Girl Long Hair blog contributor, Christina Patrice,

She is also famous for coining the terms of many of the popular natural hair styles we see today, including Senegalese Twists (Prestonia literally flew to Senegal to learn the techniques), Trini Braids, Goddess Braids, and many more. Growing alongside Prestonia is her recently launched natural hair product brand, Anu Essentials. Inspired by the transformative power of nature and botanicals, Prestonia and her Essentials line seek to provide ingredient-conscious support and solutions to meet client needs for quality hair care.

Pan Africanism and beauty culture are brought into concert in Prestonia's initiation of a linguistic shift in beauty culture, for if the terms that are used change, so may one's conscious toward an understanding and unification of African people throughout the diaspora. Prestonia's salon website also notes that Anu is a certified Hatha Yoga Instructor, Anu makes a concerted effort to encourage both staff and clients to practice healthy eating and living habits for a healthy life and healthy hair," indicative of a level of care that goes beyond hair decorum and into real *hair care*⁴⁶ illustrated in the generations explored in this work thus far. While many know Lisa Price as the creator of Carol's Daughter Products, she was also part of some of the radical hair rhetoric of the 1990s. Price's role in beauty during the 1990s is associated with radical hair rhetoric through her work on *The Cosby Show*, which exposed many African Americans to

⁴⁶ This play on words is intentional and meant to extend the bounds of hair care in African American beauty culture, in efforts to understand that hair care, skin care, and nail care for Black female professionals often exceeds corporeal maintenance and manipulation. When someone says they specialize in hair, skin, or nail care, it should be noted that the practitioner's duties exceed the tonsorial into the metaphysical.

educational and occupational accolades that had rarely appeared in mainstream American television, and due to the distribution of her products to clients, including celebrities like Erykah Badu, during a pivotal time of growth in the number of Black women transitioning to natural hair. According to Christina Patrice,

when production wrapped [of *The Cosby Show*] in 1992, Price devoted more time to her kitchen mixes, creating products such as Love Butter, Hair Milk, and Black Vanilla Hair Smoothie. She would sell her products at flea markets in Brooklyn, but eventually ended up running a storefront out of her living room as word of mouth spread.

Not only do the names of Price's products arouse the sense of smell and comforting emotions, the use of her kitchen as laboratory and factory brings to mind images of pioneers like Annie Turnbow Malone, Madam C.J. Walker, and countless other beauty professionals who began their impacting Black-woman-centric product creation by using the tools that were available to them before amassing success. The year 1997 was also a memorable moment for Black hair rhetoric as captured in the Black millennial cult classic, *B.A.P.S.*, where the high, shapely pinups, pin curls, ponytails, and hair accessories, including a fanned up-do that included the phrase *boo-yow*, resonated in the realm of visibility politics and representation amongst African American women and girls (including myself), who were cultivating hair styles that reflected a powerful amalgamation of the developing Hip-Hop culture, neighborhood and ancestral pride, and creative artistry. The then burgeoning Hollywood hair stylist Kimberly "Kim" Kimble was the creator of the culturally reminiscent hairstyles wore by *B.A.P.S.* actresses Natalie Desselle-Reid, who portrayed a hair stylist, and the hair styles of the other leading actress Halle Berry. While many recognize Kimble from her reality show *L.A. Hair* (which ran from 2012 to 2017), growth in her celebrity clientele launched her into the realm of celebrity beauty services well before the television show. Kim's celebrity clientele

advanced significantly in 1997, after only two years of serving as the proprietor of her own salon which was named Phase II as an ode to a salon that Kimble’s mom once owned (Peña Ovalle). In addition to Kimble’s unique success in the very marginalizing industry of the Hollywood beauty, professor of Cinema Studies, Priscilla Peña Ovalle, discusses Kimble’s role as a third-generation stylist. Kimble’s quality of being a third-generation stylist is central to my perspective in this overall body of work and those included in the qualitative study herein. In “Kim Kimble: Race, Gender, and the Celebrity Stylist,” Peña Ovalle employs previous interviews with Kimble and her family and asserts that her purpose is to “argue that Kimble’s identity and career—as a Black woman and third-generation hair stylist—invites us to revise racialized and gendered assumptions about ‘below the line’ labor while also observing systemic inequities that operate in the industries of hairstyling and media production. Although Peña Ovalle’s focus differs from mine, the insight she provides through interview and analysis, speaks to some of the unique qualities of an intergenerational beauty perspective, specifically where she writes,

This history of Black female stylist-entrepreneurs provides an important backdrop for Kimble’s multigenerational education. Kimble’s career builds on her mother’s and grandmother’s knowledge of hair, bolstered by training at the Vidal Sassoon Academy and the Dudley Cosmetology University in North Carolina. To better understand Kimble’s familial and industrial influences, I interviewed Jas Kimble, Kim’s mother and a cast member on *L.A. Hair*. Jas spoke about her own mother’s work as a stylist: Jas’s mother preferred to earn a steady factory paycheck and do hair at home, on the side, rather than start a business herself. Instead, she encouraged Jas to pursue hairstyling as a profession. Jas soon owned a salon in Chicago, but eventually moved to Los Angeles in pursuit of film work—despite the fact that she wasn’t sure how a Black hair stylist might get into the industry...Jas supported Kim’s growing talent, describing her daughter’s career as an extension of their family history within the industry: “What [Kim’s] created in those products is the experience of my mother and me. She put them all together. She wants to be Vidal Sassoon with a Madame C.J. Walker twist.” Both Jas and Kim pursued professional training at the Sassoon Academy... By

connecting Sassoon and Walker, Jas frames Kim as a professional with mainstream training (Sassoon) as well as specialized skills and marketing strategies (Walker). (Peña Ovalle)

The matrilineal experiences of Kimble's mother and grandmother anchored her artistic talent and provided an important road map for her career. Kim opened her first salon in L.A.—named Phaze II, a sequel to Jas' Chicago salon—in 1995. But she was inspired by her mother's interest in film and quickly sought opportunities in beauty outside of salon work.

What becomes clear in Peña's matrilineal account of Kimble's rise to success is akin to the maternal aspects of Alice Walker's concept of Womanism and the transfer of creativity from generation to generation as a unique quality of Black beauty culture and Black beauty salons. The concept of an intergenerational transfer of creativity is captured where Walker stated, "And so our mothers and grandmothers have, more often than not anonymously, handed on the creative spark, the seed of the flower they themselves never hoped to see... Guided by my heritage of a love of beauty and a respect for strength – in search of my mother's garden, I found my own" (88). The exploration of the lives and work (physical labor and community work) of Black beauty professionals in the 1990s provide insight into a phenomena that people like Kim Kimble and I, as members of intergenerational beauty families, have been exposed to via parentage but one that is accessible to Africana women via beauty culture and salons regardless of biological attachment, primarily because of that creative spark that Walker writes of that is anonymously passed. Within the Black beauty culture and the salon, as Africana women assume the roles of service provider, they almost immediately become maternal figures, healers, and wielders of a certain magic that is passed on through oral and visual byproduct, that is reminiscent of the Ancient African word heka, which according to *The Encyclopedia of African Religion* is

...an ancient Egyptian word that meant the action of a complete living force; it was also the name of an Egyptian deity. Yet the word has been confused, misused, and misunderstood because of distorted perspectives from some Westerners, who have claimed that the word Heka is the deification of magic, but that is only a part of the story. The word is literally the activating of the ka. Now it is true that some Egyptians understood heka to work by activation of the ka of a person because the embodied personality of someone's ka had great power and energy. It also includes the use of heka as activation of the ka of the gods...the principle of divine utterance, and sia, divine consciousness, to liberate consciousness. This divine action that is creative expressionism can be attained only through speech and behavior. Indeed, the cobra on the brow of the pharaoh is named Weret-Hekau, meaning the Goddess is great in Heka Power. (Asante)

The life force provided through African American beauty culture and salons is a matter, often incomprehensible or difficult to understand for many, which through engagement that exceeds mere tonsorial activities, affords Africana women the ability to liberate their consciousness and wellness in mind, body, and accomplishment.

CHAPTER 8: HAIR, THERE, AND EVERYWHERE: TAKING THE CONVERSATION TO DIFFERENT/ NEW PLACES AND THE SALON AS A REPOSITORY FOR AUTONOMY AND INDIVIDUALITY (2000-2021)

A widely used aphorism *ain't nothing new under the sun* when used by African Americans generally denotes concepts (material and immaterial) that appear in the present are a reflection of the past, albeit a development, a reduction, or an exact replica of things before, thus representing the African notion of circular time. Such is widely evident in analysis of beauty culture phenomena past and present. Retrospective analysis of Madame C.J. Walker's beauty culture career often ooze Afrofutursim, especially in regard to her mail order hair training program as advertised in 1915, where pupils could earn a diploma from the Lelia College of Hair Culture virtually (Rooks 81). In the present moment of distance learning and overall a *distance life* and in the context of societal obstacles facing Black women, the prospects of a virtual or home school cosmetology program could be revolutionary. If only we would have had learned from home cosmetology programs over the decades, where would we be now? Where would we be if we have recognized the serious contributions that black beauty culture was making to society on so many levels all along? What are the results of us taking control of our own educations, our own looks (aesthetically and rhetorically), our own jobs, our own politics overall? Perhaps the mixed reviews of Black beauty salon status that began this work may not have been such an amalgam of sadness and content if the answers to such questions were previously presented in popular culture and academic accounts. Perhaps we would have a greater contextual understanding of and appreciation for the digital salon—the metaphorical 21-year-old granddaughter of Black beauty culture and beauty salons. In order to serve as a force that sustains Africana women amidst societal

projections of postmodernity which often dismiss the continuous need for Black-women-centric spaces, the relatively young digital salon has relied on the epistemological bridge of ubiquitous beauty culture that was established and developed by previous generations of Black women.

By the year 2000 Black women bore witness to the end of many of those inspiring television shows of the 1990s that projected Black female beauty into our living rooms in exchange for content that advocated postmodern and post-racial content ideology. Additionally, the first 20 years of the millennium brought with it greater visibility of police brutality, civil rights and inclusion issues (inclusive of Black LGBTQ persons), mass incarceration, terrorism, unjust treatment and adultification of Black children, systematic racism (i.e. bias in beauty products), gentrification and subsequent housing issues, food equity issues, and more. The ability to see, literally, such issues beyond the postmodern and post-racial veil was proctored through the growth of Internet-based discourse after the year 2000, which was frequently called Y2K. Although the Year 2000 frenzy evoked fear amongst many, with apocalypse theories, the ending of an era marked a unique development in Black beauty culture– the digital salon.

According to Black Girl Curls, the digital salon is “an online gathering place for black girls and those that love us to let our literal and figurative hair down in a safe space to learn simple, effective and fact-based textured hair care from experts while celebrating our beautiful curls, coils, kinks”⁴⁷. The natural hair references evoked through the use of the word words *curl*, *coil*, and *kink* are terms that reflect discourse within the natural hair

⁴⁷ The definition was provided as part of their 2018 “Black Curl Magic Digital Salon”

community and movement. In a discussion of the Natural Hair Movement within a work entitled *'I Love this Cotton Hair': Black Women, Natural Hair, and (Re)constructions of Beauty*, beauty culture scholar and collegiate professor Kristin Rowe asserted, "It is difficult to mark a specific beginning to the current natural hair movement, because the trend began largely via the Internet, by way of Black women communicating to each other. However, many of the dates and figures discussed in the following charting of the movement begin around 2008 or 2009" (5). A critical component in Rowe's chronology is the Internet, which in my definition of the digital salon, is a key component in the increase in ubiquity of the African American beauty salon and beauty culture in the 21st century. As the latter 1990s and first few years of the 2000s brought with it worldwide interest in Internet exchanges and engagements, Black women began discussions of hair that simulated the salon environment in the early 2000s. As a nine-year-old girl I became a big sister of a little girl born with a head full of hair, and I was excited to have another person to try my burgeoning beauty skills on (in addition to my older sister and some of my friends). One of my most vivid beauty culture memories associated with my younger sister occurred in 2004. In my mom's salon which was no longer a small studio in our laundry room but now a full storefront in a strip mall, my little sister's hair was blow-dried into a straight style for the first time, and it became a topic of conversation in the salon. The salon conversation surrounding my little sister's blow-dried hair was one full of awe from the reactions of some salon participants and from others, the responses were characterized by agony and scorn; questions of whether her hair had been relaxed or pressed soon followed in spaces outside of the four walls of my mom's salon. From that 2004 summer day forward, I recall seeing several African American women and girls

being provided service in my mother's salon without chemical straightening. As a third-generation stylist, I have been seeing natural hair move my entire life in beauty education and beauty salon spaces given the ephemeral nature of Black women's hair styles, but there was certainly an uptake in transitions from the use of chemical straighteners around 2008. As a licensed cosmetologist and college freshman in 2008, I encountered women on campus, in the salon in my hometown where I worked on weekends, and people on Facebook discussing their engagements with non-chemically straightened hair. Those conversations looked and sounded almost exactly like the ones I heard over the course of my eighteen years and they were supplemented by conversations of ancestry and cultural history that I had not heard before as Black women orally traversed their ancestry through their hair strands. Epiphanies like: I never knew my hair was so much like my mothers or fathers and my hair is so different than my mothers or fathers, and curiosity as to why were frequent in those conversations. While my point of this chapter is not to chronicle the Natural Hair Movement, or my personal journey therein, the following quote from Rowe illuminates the connection of my version of the digital salon as a daughter of Black beauty culture and salons, where she writes,

Ultimately, it is important to consider natural hair blogs, because the current natural hair movement began and flourished largely via the Internet (Byrd and Tharps, Muhammed, Yawson). Prior to both the Internet and the natural hair movement, Black women often met up physically in hair salons, friends' homes, and their own kitchens to both get their hair "fixed" (straightened and/ or relaxed) and dialogue about hair care. However, after "going natural," many women no longer regularly frequent hair salons. This is because there is no longer a need or expectation for them to regularly have their hair straightened. Thus, Black women created new spaces to exchange ideas about their hair—spaces the Internet has allowed endless room for. There are now a massive number of Twitter pages, Instagram pages, Facebook pages, websites, blogs, and YouTube channels dedicated to styles, maintenance, and lifestyle choices regarding natural hair (33).

As Rowe's words underscore a metaphorically biological connection between the beauty salon and the digital salon, what lies therein is an age-old sentiment that hair straightening is one of the only hair engagements to emerge from the salon or that our dialogue was constantly one of *fixing* or *repair* only, while the work herein and in many other spaces, contradict such essentializing representations of the salon (in its various formats). Contrary to the millennial trend in popular culture, this work analyzes the salon's function as a site of beauty culture that has maintained Africana women's privacy and safety from oppression while making an impact, manifest in appearance and thought, that has historically enabled Black women to have such liberating conversations in virtual spaces. The realization of the digital salon and physical or in person sites of beauty as part of the same continuum and phenomena must be realized to continue agency of Africana women through beauty culture. The similarities in African American women's language in virtual spaces and the rhetorical attitudes displayed there are so similar to those in physical spaces of beauty culture (i.e., salons, kitchens, porches, etc.) that the relationship therein is vastly evident. While there are many similarities between in-person beauty culture and salon discourse, and the beauty culture and discourse of the digital salon, one of the most liberating aspects of the digital salon is its ability to enact Pan-Africanism in the context of hair thus combatting oppressive forces throughout the African diaspora and the world.

While Madam Walker, Marjorie Joyner, and countless other beauty professionals employed beauty culture to aid in the uplift of African people throughout the world, the digital salon has been able to do so faster. According to *African Americans: A Concise History* 3rd Edition, the year 2000, U.S. statistics showed that,

281, 421, 906 Americans, a 13.2 percent increase from 1990. African-American numbers stood at 34.7 million, or about 12 percent of the total. For the first time in U.S. history, African Americans were no longer the largest minority group: the 35.2 million Americans who identified themselves as Hispanic slightly outnumbered them...One of the most important changes in the census was the ability of respondents to choose more than one racial designation for themselves since the first census, such classifications have been shaped by the politics of race...in 1977 the Office of Management and Budget addressed the U.S. government's need for standard racial categories with its Statistical Policy Directive 15. This set up the familiar racial classifications: white, black, Asian and Pacific Islander, and Native American. "Hispanic" was chosen to denote an ethnicity and could be selected in addition to one of the four racial categories. Because there is no scientific backing for any biological racial distinctions, these categories are bureaucratic approximations of socially relevant distinctions designed to serve administrative needs. They were not necessarily meant to reflect the complex identity of many individuals included in them...the debate over biracial and multiracial identities ranges in the African American community one of the most significant concerns is that to make fundamental changes in the classification system will undermine the projects they were designed to advance (Clarke Hine 629).

The European project of colonialism and African separation, which has historical origin in antiquity, remains vastly functional in the present day as evidenced in the aforementioned quote. While there is a large discourse regarding census information and identity, the topic is relevant to this work because the digital salon has engaged Black beauty culture in ways that have combatted divisive forces that have functioned toward separation amongst the African diaspora. Black hair acceptance has been an issue globally across the diaspora, even in Egypt, the home of Black—and all— beauty culture. In a 2018 article entitled, "Beauty Standards: Egypt's Curly Hair Comeback", author Dina Aboughazala, writes,

...when a Facebook group was launched in March 2016 to help women take care of their hair naturally, the response was huge. Today, two years since it started, the Hair Addict group has more than 105,000 female members, 95% of whom are actively interacting with the group's content. Doaa Gawish, 38, launched the group after she herself suffered because of her hair... After it began, the group grew into almost a cult, where followers shared hair-care routines and soon took the bolder step of going completely heat-free. The heat-free challenge started in

July 2016 and since then it has been a big success... Noran Amr, 32, has been heat-free for a year... But Noran says this change would not have been possible if it were not for the various groups that emerged on social media... Today, there are several Egyptian groups providing tips and advice for taking care of curly hair... As a result of the growing demand, the first curly hair salon opened in this year. Situated in one of Egypt's most affluent neighbourhoods, The Curly Studio - unlike most Egyptian salons - works on appointment basis only. It receives more than 30 clients a week, mostly young women.

The shared exchange of hair stories via social media by the African women in Egypt essentially led to a significant development of not only a physical salon devoted to African women's natural hair but an entire movement which mirrors and draws an accessible connection to the movement in the United States of America. As African women located in the United States, Egypt, and many other countries access images and dialogue reflective of their shared African heritage and beauty concepts, matters of national origin, location, and divisive constructs created by colonialism, are thwarted.

The digital salon also began to serve as another space to replicate and reproduce beauty advertisements geared toward Black women via websites, social media, and television streaming. In a chapter entitled "Black Women's Hair Politics in Advertising" featured in *Feminist Perspectives on Advertising: What's the Big Idea?* Natalie A. Mitchell and Angelica Morris explore the myriad impacts that advertising has on African American women's beauty discourse and overall culture. The work is discursively significant in many respects, one which includes their mention of themes to "watch out for" in their discussion of the history of advertising black women's hair care products within the United States. In their warning, Mitchell and Morris state "despite the deprecation of black people and cultures in advertising, some scholars hold onto hope that advertising, blogging, and social media have the potential to reshape wider

mainstream values with regard to the politics of black women's hair” (62). While print advertising is tangibly full of controversial (to say the least) Black advertisements, those intangible ads used in Internet and social media spaces today carry just as much significance as those in print and Black women in the digital salon have openly critiqued such things. Frustration, anger and upset were expressed by Black women via social media and vlog websites, especially in regard to a 2017 ShaeMoisture advertisement that expressed the message “break free from hair hate” yet, the advertisement failed to reflect its largely African American consumer base⁴⁸. Given the history of advertising and its tendency to recapitulate stereotypes of Africana people, a reshaping at its hands is unlikely unless there is a paradigmatic shift amongst advertisers. Many Africana women have employed the use of personal social media profiles and business profiles to post images and videos of independently developed beauty culture advertisements and used hashtags and virtual post challenges to express one’s own sentiments and values directly.

From such expressions, the digital salon has also spawned a language shift in Black beauty culture. Black hair has functioned as a coded language for a long time, as evidenced by Alice Nicholas in “Liberatory Expressions: Black Women, Resistance and The Coded Word, An Africological Examination”, where she writes,

Though the practice of word coding remains an active part of black culture, centuries of colonial decentering have resulted in the dislocation of black people (Asante 2003, 2007; Mazama, 2003) who, even when instinctively coding it, are no longer decoding the word in the same way. For example, hair, for black women, is more than a covering or an adornment of the head (27).

⁴⁸ Although ShaeMoisture removed the advertisement quickly following backlash, it can be found in the myriad of responses from Black women captured in YouTube videos, tweets, and articles, such as Janice Williams’s “Black Is Beautiful: Shea Moisture Ad Reveals How African-American Women Are Often Maligned by Beauty Industry”.

In congruence with Nicholas's assertion, there are many reflections of coding in the digital salon at present that do not necessarily involve decoding, specifically the current use of hair as code switching, hair in negotiations, and curl type nomenclature. Black women's hair was mentioned in a cursory statement within a 2018 *Refinery 29* "Go Off Sis" video on YouTube entitled "How Black Women Really Speak to Each Other", that focused on code-switching amongst Black women. One woman in the video is featured saying "So, code switching is more than just a voice too, we code switch with our hair, we code switch with the kinds of conversations we choose to have in certain settings," in that laconic statement, the woman contextualizes the instinct of coding as an action that manifest ephemerally in Black women's hair. Likewise, vast graphics and conversations about curl pattern, ranging from loosely to tightly curled appear in the digital salon, with the nomenclature 1, 2A, 2B,2C, 3A, 3B, 3C, 4A, 4B, and 4C as descriptors to distinguish, typify, or reference curl patterns. In an exceptional analysis, Kristin Rowe discusses the role of language within hair politics in her 2019 text, "Beyond 'Good Hair': Negotiating Hair Politics Through African American Language" wherein she specifically decodes popular hair terms that are observable in the digital salon including hair inspiration, length-check, and shrinkage before she contextualizes her findings from focus groups that discussed the aforementioned terms (51). The language definition and exploration of the three examples are especially representative of the contemplation and significance of Black beauty culture in the digital space. While there are superfluous benefits to adding, editing, and enacting shifts in language via the digital salon, there is much opportunity in and warrant for both coding and decoding the language and discourse of Black beauty culture in efforts to better understand knowledge origin and production, which this work

initiates in the following intergenerational qualitative study and as intended in my future research.

In addition to the applicability of Pan-Africanism to beauty culture in the *new millennium* and the digital salon, notions of Black feminism, Womanism, and Africana Womanism are also applicable to the last 21 years. Over time a myriad of communal effort and events (both virtual and in person) have risen in celebration of Black hair, wherein Africana women are able to engage beauty culture as a rhetorical tool that not only counters oppression but also unites women in fellowship, many of those events include: The World Natural Hair Show, Curl Fest, Afro Punk, Afram, and more. Additionally, music from Black women and girls have served to reflect such notions including India. Arie's song, "I Am Not My Hair", released in 2006, and Willow Smith's song, "Whip My Hair", released in 2010.

It is quite evident that the salon is has been thriving in the digital media platforms over that last 21 years, which is rather beneficial in the era of a pandemic. However, while the digital space features many of the quintessential elements of the salon and they have been of great support to Africana women, there is still relevance to physical sites of beauty culture from whence the digital salon emerged, namely beauty salons which have been critical in developing and facilitating Africana women's ability to fellowship, learn, create, and execute actions that combat dehumanizing forces that adversely impact not only Africana women with un-straightened hair, but those that impact the larger African diasporic community of which the African woman is the life force. There need not be a dichotomous relationship between the digital salon and the physical salon, but rather a

complementary relationship in which the two are spoken of as members of the same continuum of an inherently African epistemology regarding beauty and women's agency.

CHAPTER 9: THE BIGGER THE HAIR, THE HARDER THEY'LL STARE: QUALITATIVE STUDY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE EMPOWERMENT OF THE SALON

Thus far, this analysis has illustrated the significance of beauty culture and salons at some of the most pivotal moments in African American history. Part of the way Black women in America resist and combat oppression has been through the expression of consciousness via hair and efforts cultivated within beauty culture over the course of the last hundred years. Black beauty culture and salons have historically engendered agency by fostering a bridge between African women's cultural, personal, spiritual, and social knowledge through interactions with oneself, supernatural elements, and other humans specifically through the use of sight, sound, and feeling (both tactile and emotional). While much of my intergenerational beauty perspective as a third-generation stylist has been narratively disclosed in the previous chapters, this final chapter is dedicated to the presentation of qualitative data generated from interviews with ten women who hail from intergenerational families of beauty practice. The findings of this phenomenological study of intergenerational Black families of beauty service providers, extends and supports the overall assertion of this discursive analysis, which is that the African American salon and beauty culture are a collective discursive space that serves as a hub of agency for African women per its epistemological characteristics.

The purpose of this study is to explore the nature of African American women's beliefs about and relationship with African American beauty salons and beauty culture. Through one-on-one interviews, this intergenerational study will explore characteristics of the African American salon and African American beauty culture that have fashioned or constructed the salon as a significant and sacred space in the lives of African women

in America, and the role of conversations in establishing and maintain the salon's significance and sacredness. During the individualized *virtual* interviews (warranted by the pandemic and supported by the digital salon's existence), each participant was asked a series of open-ended questions to elicit and explore the following notions: African American women's beliefs about African American beauty salons in general; thoughts about and feelings of a connection to the African American beauty salon and beauty culture; the manners in which the salon has played a role in life decisions amongst African American women; and the role of discourse (communication) in the creation and maintenance of the beauty salon and beauty culture amongst African American women. The following questions were asked within the study.

Interview Questions

1. When you think about the African American beauty salon what comes to mind?
2. What was your first encounter with an African American beauty salon? What do you recall of it?
3. When did you discover a desire to provide beauty services (hair, nails, skin, or makeup)? What is your earliest memory of that aspiration?
4. Did you work or volunteer in beauty culture in your youth (i.e., salons, barbershops, trade shows, beauty supply stores)?
5. Describe your experience being a member of an intergenerational family of beauty service providers. Who in previous generations of your family provided beauty services to African American women? Did their work impact you? If so, how?

6. Are there any beauty traditions, cultural beliefs, hair stories, or myths shared by the generations before you? The people you cite can be the relatives that were in the industry before you or other elders in beauty culture.
7. Who is in control within the salon environment amongst African American women? Is it anyone in particular?
8. What is it like when a beauty session is silent? Have you ever witnessed this or took part in this type of salon engagement?
9. Do you think your role in beauty is important and why? What has created this belief?
10. What are some lessons that you learned from being in the salon or in beauty culture over the course of your life?
11. When a famous African American beauty practitioner comes to mind who is it?

Demographic (Figure 1)

Each participant was deemed eligible for study participation after identifying with one of the two categories listed in table A.1. There were 10 participants total. 40% identified with group A. 60% identified with group B.

Participant Group A.	Participant Group B.
Biological Family Member of Student Researcher	No Biological Relation to Student Researcher
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • has served as a licensed cosmetologist (or have a limited cosmetology license i.e., hair stylist, nail technician, esthetician, or limited blow dry stylist); or has served as a beauty service provider to African American women outside of your biological family for a sustained period • comes from a family that provides beauty services to African American women, extending at least one generation immediately before and/or after yourself • identify as a woman of African/African diasporic descent (i.e., African American, Continental African, Afro Latina/x, Afro Caribbean) • are at least 18 years of age 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • currently serve as a licensed cosmetologist (or have a limited cosmetology license i.e., hair stylist, nail technician, esthetician, or limited blow dry stylist) or have held such licensed status in the past • have provided beauty services to clients or customers within the last 3 years • comes from a family that provides beauty services to African American women, extending at least one generation before yourself • identify as a woman of African/African diasporic descent (i.e., African American, Continental African, Afro Latina/x, Afro Caribbean) • are at least 18 years of age

Coding System (Figure 2)

The following system represents interview questions and responses categorized thematically and with regard for how the information was taken into the participant's schema.

Question	Mode(s) of Knowledge:	Themes: Recurrent Terms/Concepts Included in Subject Responses
1. When you think about the African American beauty salon what comes to mind?	Feeling	fellowship, friendship, family, girlfriends, people; healing, therapy, relax, safe, good, time
	Seeing	creativity, fun, place
	Hearing	information, resources, talk, products, tools
2. What was your first encounter with an African American beauty salon? What do you recall of it?	Feeling	comfort, normal, good, yes, love, introduced during childhood,
	Seeing	ownership, do hair, introduced by family members, introduced by non-family members
	Hearing	laugh, talk, speak, hair styles/procedures
3. When did you discover a desire to provide beauty services (hair, nails, skin, or makeup)? What is your earliest memory of that aspiration?	Feeling	Age: double digits, single digits; tools, products, exciting, normal, trusted, good,
	Seeing	tools, products, styles, family
	Hearing	
4. Did you work or volunteer in beauty culture in your youth (i.e., salons, barbershops, trade shows, beauty supply stores)?	Feeling	Age: 11
	Seeing	Compensation
	Hearing	
5. Describe your experience being a member of an intergenerational family of beauty service providers. Who in previous generations of your family provided beauty services to African American women? Did their work impact you? If so, how?	Feeling	fun, happy, pleased, changed, everything needed, super inspired, impacted, Queen, cool, responsibility, love, meaningful, trust
	Seeing	People: mother, grandmother, aunt, uncle, father, sisters, daughter, granddaughter Positions: owner, senior cosmetologist, Spaces: high school, salon, grandmother's house Supplies: pressing comb, Marcel Irons, flatiron, relaxer, Jherri Curl Actions: hard working, straightening, pressing, blowdrying
	Hearing	
6. Are there any beauty traditions, cultural beliefs, hair stories, or myths shared by the generations before you? The people you cite	Feeling	
	Seeing	
	Hearing	wrap your hair, moisturize, growth, greased, mom, Gray hair, burns, color, price,

can be the relatives that were in the industry before you or other elders in beauty culture.		grandmother, great grandmother, favorite stories, respect, water, chemicals, relaxer, perms, curl pattern, daughters, nasty/messed up/right/done, pregnant, cut, wash, hair loss, thicker hair, cocoa butter, vitamin E, Mayo, eggs, vinegar
7. Who is in control within the salon environment amongst African American women? Is it anyone in particular?	Feeling	impressive, empowered
	Seeing	the hair stylist, clients, owner, first chair, strongest, most seasoned,
	Hearing	music
8. What is it like when a beauty session is silent? Have you ever witnessed this or took part in this type of salon engagement?	Feeling	open, boring, focus, not normal, odd, wrong, new, feel you out, awkward, chemistry, relax, vibe, mood, strange
	Seeing	elderly, sleep, pandemic
	Hearing	talking, music, loud
9. Do you think your role in beauty is important and why? What has created this belief?	Feeling	Love, impact, confide, tell, listen, questions, trust, help, change, knowledge, good, education,
	Seeing	family members, clients
	Hearing	clients
10. What are some lessons that you learned from being in the salon or in beauty culture over the course of your life?	Feeling	acceptance, selling short/downplaying, discipline, discretion, boundaries, offense, open
	Seeing	Watch/observe / notice
	Hearing	natural hair, overtalking/oversharing, listen network, criticism, speak
11. When a famous African American beauty practitioner comes to mind who is it?	Feeling	
	Seeing	hair stylists, makeup artists
	Hearing	

Using a structured interview style as part of this larger discursive analysis, the interviews above were conducted with four women within my intergenerational family dynamic and six women of no relation to me who are part of their own respective intergenerational family dynamics. After all interviews were completed, they were thematically coded (per figure 2). Subsequently, profiling was used to piece together a story that reveals an Afrocentric intergenerational method of discourse analysis for exploring African American women's relationship with beauty culture and salons. In the development and application of this intergenerational methodology, feeling, knowing (through seeing and hearing), and acting— were privileged in understanding, analyzing, and presenting information about knowledge creation generated from African American beauty culture and salons. The content below represents analytical findings derived from the interviews that relied on dialogue to explore time, place, environment, myths, customs, habits, and behaviors that are true for women of the African diaspora engaged in African-derived beauty culture and salons in America. This study opposes inhumanity by placing Africana beauty service providers and their foremothers— brought in through invocation of memory and Nommo—as subjects in the discussion of Black women's identity and agency in America. The speech content from participant responses has provided answers and insight to the question: what are African American women currently teaching others and learning about ourselves within beauty culture? How does that epistemology create agency for Black women in 2021? How has such agency existed in the past? How can that agency be extended into the future?

Narrative Presentation of Qualitative Findings

As the interviews began participants were asked to share the thoughts that came into their mind upon thinking of the African American beauty salon, and a majority of their responses included words that described enjoyable engagement with other women who many saw as family. In the intimate environment narrated and described by the women, the salon was represented as a space of catharsis and safety that provided positive outcomes both material and immaterial. Jessica, a second-generation stylist, laconically and powerfully described the metaphysical qualities by deeming it a “safe space,” and Marie highlighted corporeal qualities when she responded “oh...beauty, style...we like to look good”. The community image is painted in the words of Michai and Raven who individually mentioned “good girlfriends” and family respectively, while Carolyn, Nicey, and Jazmine each introduced “fellowship” into the milieu. The term “everything” appeared in the responses of the participant named 9 and Carolyn. Nicey— one of three third-generation-stylists that were interviewed— shared a vivid description of the salon that reflected many beliefs that were common in the data while also provoking themes of human-to-human and human-to-the-supernatural relationships when she said, “I would say fellowship, friendship, family, creativity, fun. A place of healing, a place of sharing resources, a place of economic stability...It's where you see people grow, you know, inside and out, you see their insecurities, you see their, you know, their lifestyles, you see personalities, you see all kinds of dynamics. I think the salon is pretty much a place for women to congregate safely”.

In the recollection of their first encounter with the African American beauty salon many interviewees spoke about things they felt, saw, and heard in the salon space. With 70% of the participants overtly mentioning their age or stage of life upon first encounter

with the salon, the majority of the participants indicated that their first encounter occurred before their teenage years. In describing when they realized they wanted to provide beauty services, 70% of the participants overtly mentioned ages 12 and under. One of the remaining 30%, a second-generation provider, realized her desire at 13 after initial annoyance from having to frequently help her mom in the industry; in describing her experience she stated that, she realized “that it comes second nature to me...why not make a career out of this”. Another of the 30%, a third-generation provider similarly stated, “...I guess all that stuff kind of came naturally to me, so I don't necessarily know if I aspired, but I knew I was good at whatever it was that I did”. Although all of the participants did not recognize an aspiration to provide services in beauty culture in their single digit ages, their aspiration or skillset was still realized in their youth, which is typically a time of confusion for many people. However, beauty culture uniquely allows Black girls to realize their interests, capabilities, and talents in a society that does not frequently support such realizations. Considering the fact that 60% of the interviewees’ first recollections of the Black beauty salon did not include them having service provided, it is evident that there were other elements functioning in the salon outside of personal grooming that were significant enough to remain in their core memories. However, styles, tools, and products were certainly notable, as 70% of the participants recalled personal engagements of certain styles, tools, and products or recollected having saw specific styles, tools, and products engaged by others in the salon. The significance of ownership, albeit of a biological relative or a person of no relation, was also recurrent in the interviews, as 60% of the participants overtly recall their first encounter being in a space owned by an African American. The participant named 9, recalled, “when I first

got my license in the state of Florida, there was a lady that asked me to go work at her hair salon, and that was my first encounter with that. She was pretty good when it came to [sic], like, mentoring in a way...I feel like it was more mixed, too. There was a lot of also like [sic] Latin culture involved there in that area. So, it was like [sic] a mixture of the two". Carolyn stated, "I was about seven, seven or eight years old, I had a neighbor who owned, uh [sic], he was the first black man that I actually knew who owned a hair salon. And it was named after him and I was his daughter's friend...And so I recall going to the salon. I never went and got my hair done there, but I remember going to the salon. And this is during a time when Black people didn't really, didn't own a lot of nothing, you know, in the P.G. County area. And so, going there and thinking: He really owns this salon? Like, does he do hair? You know; what does he do? So I went; when we went, I didn't see anybody in it, I think we went after the hours to make sure everything was going okay, but that was my first experience with the salon". As the reflections of Carolyn and the participant named 9 reflect continuity across bounds of gender and space with regard for state lines and the African diasporic presence in the United States, feelings of the theme of comfort in Black beauty salons are magnified.

60% of the interviewees shared that volunteer beauty work was part of their experiences during their youth, while 20% did not volunteer, and the other 20% reflected uncertainty of their volunteer status because of their constant involvement in the salon owned by a family member. In discussing volunteer activity during her youth, Zariah said, "I wouldn't say that I volunteered, but being as though I was around it basically my whole life, I was always in the environment, so I was always handing somebody something or going to the back and getting something..." and London stated, "My mom

owned a salon so every now and then well, even before she even owned a salon, every now and then I would go with her to the salon and shampoo for her and she taught me when I was maybe 11 or so, how to shampoo properly”. London’s work reflects an aspect of significance in the data, as half of those who had volunteered in their youth overtly mentioned being 11 years old when they began. Another outstanding element was that 40% of the participants mentioned being compensated. Accordingly, Jazmine and Nicey overtly mentioned having a pricelist as youths, as had Jessica when she reflected upon the moment when she realized that she wanted to provide services. The youth engagements in each of the participant’s responses and their incorporation of compensation as a topic illuminates the function of the salon that allows women to see and hear as a means of learning economic value, even at a young age.

Per the study requirements each participant hailed from an intergenerational legacy of beauty service provision. 70% cited their mother and or grandmother, the latter 30% mentioned an aunt, their father, their daughter(s), and grandchildren as part of their intergenerational dynamic. In regard to the impact that their family member’s work had, the participants through the act of seeing family members in positions of power, their respective beauty service places/spaces, their supplies, and their actions were all of import; each of those elements had similarity to quintessentially considered learning environments (i.e., schools, domestic settings, etc.). Positive feelings were expressed toward those of each interviewee’s family. Nicey stated, “Before she passed, she bought all of my supplies. She took time to make sure I had everything I needed. And I can say, if anything, my grandmother super-inspired me to move forward in the industry”. 9 said, “It impacted me because like [*sic*], my mom, I used to see her doing everything, all types

of hair and that's like what pushed me to want to do everything and not just box myself into one thing". Carolyn mentioned an uncle who provided beauty supplies, but her mother was the focus where she stated, "So, my mother, of course, she was the one. She was the pressing comb queen, she still is. But my mother is a lefty, so it was always a little different watching her do people's hair...I would see her press people's hair. And she only had one-size curler. I don't know if that was the only size that she could get or if that was before they started making different sizes...I used to think it was so cool...And so she would be twirling those curlers around...". In speaking of her aunt, Michai stated, "she still has clients and she's like 70 years old, so just to see how meaningful her work is, even in her old age and people still come to her and trust her to do their hair. I think that's something that I want in the future for myself". Marie stated, "Well, I know that was something that I wanted to do, but I had no idea that, uh [*sic*], the ones under me wanted to do the same thing. And it goes on and on, and I was surprised. My daughter, my granddaughters, my brother... Well, my daughter and grandchildren...I was pleased that they did what they did—I was happy. I'm proud of what they've done with it, and how things have changed from then and now. The human-to-human aspect of beauty culture and salon phenomenon is magnified as the women share adulation for women who have provided services as part of their legacy.

Per Afrocentric thought, the myths and hair stories discussed by the women interviewed in the study, revealed a unique ontology that often crossed the chasm of human-to-human relations and human-to-supernatural relations. Hair stories and myths also revealed a cosmology that signified an in-depth relationship between Africana women and not only one's own hair but also that of others. Laughter, excitement, and

concern existed in the tone of participants in this segment of the interviews. 60% of the myths and hair stories came from the interviewees' mothers, grandmothers, and/or great-grandmothers, the others were mentioned in general without specific origin. The overall category was about hair growth and loss, with specific topics about always wrapping and greasing the hair to keep it moist, the need or lack thereof for relaxers, removal of gray hair, issues with touching one's hair including pregnant persons, and as Zariah mentioned, "I've heard that you shouldn't let people touch your hair who don't have good intentions because your hair is going to fall-out". Other thematic categories included terminology and outside appearance. Jazmine specifically mentioned terminology corrections where she stated, "Yes...a huge myth to me right now is that people say, ugh [*sic*], and I hate when they say it, perms—number one, we don't perm our hair, we are African American we relax our hair— but that's one; we don't wash our hair. You wash clothes, you shampoo hair. So, perms don't make your hair fall out; that's not true. Like, that one drives me insane. I know that we have a lot of natural people who don't get relaxers and don't get chemicals, and I absolutely love them for it, but that's a huge myth, they don't make your hair fall out. And another huge myth is, it was the grease—no it wasn't the grease, you might've actually accidentally burned me". Lack of desirability by potential partners due to unkempt hair, was a myth shared by Carolyn. Michai debunked skin myths, stating, "Yes. That cocoa butter fixes everything...It definitely does not. Vitamin E pills are the answer, and they are not". Nicey shared a hair-story that was passed down to her wherein it was said that "wetting hair down" would occur occasionally if someone failed to alert the stylist of their inability to pay prior to the completion of service and subsequently decided not to pay the stylist for her labor. As

the hair stories and myths were shared, it was evident that oral communication and culturally contrived notions are in constant flux in Black beauty culture and salons, denoting creative, analytical, and critical thought within the salon and beauty culture phenomenon.

With just four of ten participants identifying with having taken part in a silent beauty session, and the reoccurrence of words that describe that silence as an atypical engagement, it is quite evident that Black beauty culture and salons are marked by conversation and knowledge creation through hearing, seeing, and feeling an exchange of ideas and energy. When the idea of control in the salon environment was questioned, as in who has control, 60% of the participants said no one in particular was in control but instead control was shared amongst the women in various roles in the salon environment. There was a 100% yes from all participants when asked if they believed that their role in beauty culture was important. The women mentioned various terms in which they regarded themselves as a resource and a caretaker of others in their capacity as a beauty professional. There were many lessons learned by the participants, thus revealing a true epistemology or system of knowledge creation engendered in beauty culture and salons. Participants described lessons that included feeling and hearing ideas that they could use in the industry and in life in general such as acceptance, listening, vigilance over oneself, mindful behaviors, and self-worth. As the interviews concluded and participants were asked to share the name of a famous beauty professional; the vast majority mentioned Madam C. J. Walker, Kim Kimble was also cited, and there were occurrences wherein a stylist's name was difficult for participants to recall yet that person's memorable work was described in place of their name.

As this review of study findings and this overall work conclude, this body of work is replete with findings that can be organized in an Afrocentric theoretical way, one that specifically aligns with Ferreira's assertion that "In an epistemological framework structured around African codes, paradigms, symbols, motifs, and myths, the African becomes the subject of history not only as a subject (Asante, 1988: 6) but as its agent in the world arena," which is Afrocentricity personified (165). This analytical task has combed through over 100 years of Black beauty culture which was transcended via cultural continuity in two spaces where African women met to engage in communal spiritual and aesthetic activities that worked to achieve Ma'at. Although the format looks different in minimal aspects, the overall epistemological force remains the same in 2020, thus, the Kemetic eleventh dynasty, 15th century West Africa, and the Southern United States between the 16th and 19th centuries, made way for the 100 years of Black beauty culture in the United States as described here. As Black people in America continue to have to assert "Black Lives Matter" for sheer recognition of personhood, there is relevance in maintaining all of our sacred spaces, especially the Black beauty salon and beauty culture which has generated not only looks that rhetorically shift paradigms, but words, actions, and feelings that foster an epistemology that can aid in the liberation of Africans in the United States and abroad.

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