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THE FUNCTIONAL AND SYMBOLIC ROLES OF HAIR AND HEADGEAR
AMONG AFRO-AMERICAN WOMEN: A CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro

PH.D. 1982

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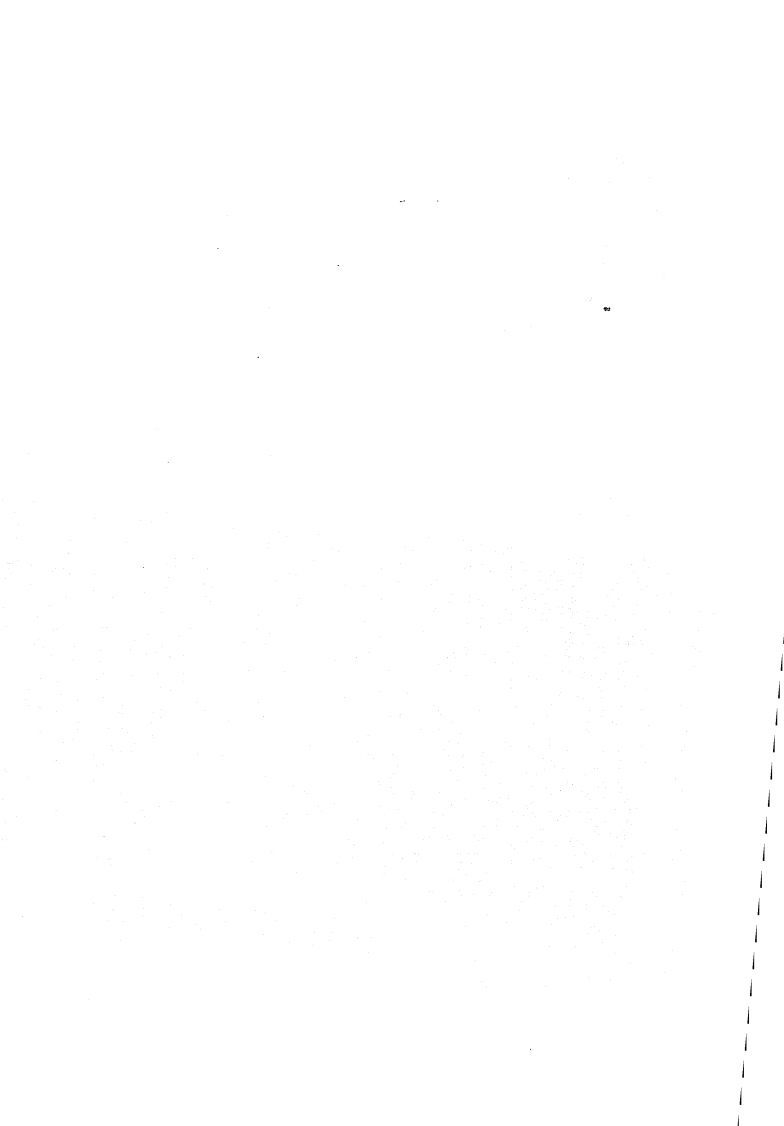
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THE FUNCTIONAL AND SYMBOLIC ROLES OF HAIR AND
HEADGEAR AMONG AFRO-AMERICAN WOMEN:
A CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

by

Anna Atkins Simkins

A Dissertation submitted to
the Faculty of the Graduate School at
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Doctor of Philosophy

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Approved by

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Dissertation Adviser

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of the Graduate School at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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March 4, 1982
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SIMKINS, ANNA ATKINS. The Functional and Symbolic Roles of Hair and Headgear among Afro-American Women: A Cultural Perspective. (1982)
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This study examined the significance of the functional and symbolic roles of hair and headgear among Afro-American women. The presence of these aspects of adornment was traced in African and Afro-American settings from pre-colonial Africa to contemporary New World societies. The investigation included the analyses of comparative sources, including descriptive accounts, visual documentation, and contemporary data. The focused interview technique was used to collect data from a non-random sample of Afro-American women, aged twenty to ninety. Beliefs, attitudes, perceptions, and motivations relating to hair management and adornment were studied.

The conclusions drawn from comparative sources presented the idea that hair and headgear are two characteristics chosen by Afro-American women for aesthetic expression, maintenance of non-verbal communication, reinterpretation of traditional African forms, and dramatization of ethnic identity. A union of function and symbol was found in the adornment of the hair and head among Afro-American women in both historical and contemporary contexts.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Much can be understood about the culture of a people from the manifestations of their aesthetic attitudes and their objects of material expression. The art of personal adornment has been a primary expression of aesthetic values throughout the history of mankind. The powerful appeal of adornment simultaneously affects and reflects the pattern of human behavior on both functional and symbolic levels. Modes of personal adornment may give evidence of status or cultural differences, define and express selfhood, mark life stages within a culture, and communicate or reinforce ethnic identification. Thus, among the studies of expressive culture are those which have examined adornment as a manifestation of the prevailing ideology. Scholars of textiles and clothing support an interdisciplinary approach which encompasses the component of aesthetics as a corrolary to the components of behavior, environment and culture.

The movement for equality among Afro-Americans has given impetus to much research on topics related to the Afro-American experience in the New World. However, research has been lacking which analyzes personal adornment as documentation for the unique quality of the Afro-American experience in New World societies. While much attention has been given to Afro-American musical and linguistic forms, the matter of personal adornment has largely been ignored or neglected in scholarly research.

Two aspects of personal adornment which appear to have been constants in the expressive history of Afro-Americans in the New World are those of the manipulation of the hair and the use of headgear. One example of this constancy is the headkerchief, an item of attire that is universal to Afro-American societies in their varied cultural settings.

This investigation proposes that these aspects of adornment are important non-verbal media through which transformations in the acculturative progressions of Afro-Americans may be examined. The primary objective of the study is to explore the significance of hairstyles and headgear among Afro-American women. The focus on women is a conscious attempt to examine personal adornment within the unique complexities of this particular group. Contemporary expressive motivations and behavior are examined along with descriptive accounts, related references to adornment and cultural identification, and visual documentation of particular styles or stylistic periods.

As primary non-verbal communicators, stylistic interpretations related to the adornment of the hair and head among Afro-Americans may serve to document continuities of African expressive forms, to reflect a uniquely creative aesthetic interpretation, and to define the personal and collective investment of Afro-Americans in New World cultural styles. It is hoped that this study of selected aspects of personal adornment and their stylistic manifestations may add yet another dimension to the understanding and appreciation of Afro-American life and history.

CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Research of the literature on aspects of stylistic interpretations among Afro-Americans entails limitations that are related to the nature of the Afro-American experience in the New World. References to dress and adornment in studies of Afro-Americana are largely descriptive and do not give primary focus to the role of personal adornment in Afro-American cultures. Generally speaking, the question of personal adornment is regarded as incidental to the main thesis rather than as integral to the culture complex. The character of the Afro-American experience reinforces this lack of attention. Historically, Afro-Americans have not been in the position to define for posterity their perceptions of personal adornment, nor has their status been such as to engender serious interest in the expressive manifestations of their dress and adornment. However, there are references to the manipulation of the hair and headgear which appear in literature that deals with other spheres of Afro-American life and history.

The review of literature pertinent to this investigation is discussed under the following major headings: (1) theories and concepts significant to a recognition of the problem; (2) descriptive accounts of historical and contemporary significance; (3) related studies and references to the problem; (4) selected literary works of relevance to the problem; and (5) visual documentation of stylistic features.

Theories and Concepts
Significant to a Recognition of the Problem

Certain approaches to the dynamics of culture contact and change serve to reinforce the relevance of the study of personal adornment within a culture and can be applied to various cultural or ethnic groups. The application of these concepts to the Afro-American experience provides a frame of reference for this study. The management of the hair and headgear may be particularistic in its functional and symbolic significance. However, the aptness of these concepts to this aspect of Afro-American stylistic expression can be postulated.

In the general context of culture contact and change, Barth examined the use of strategies by ethnic groups bent on the pursuit of participation in wider social systems, and outlined those strategies used by minority groups in the process of acculturation. Barth further suggested that a fascinating field for study could be the interconnections between the diacritica that are chosen for emphasis, the boundaries that are defined, and the differentiating values that are espoused. Also, he noted that much attention must be given to the revival of selected culture traits.¹

While dress and adornment were not specified, Memmi cited attempts of colonized peoples to follow the model of the colonizer, with subsequent rejection of this tactic in favor of the resurrection of a long-abandoned heritage.² Mason supported this concept and noted the importance of symbolic dress to those cultures and sub-cultures which

seek to maintain their ethnic identity during the process of acculturation.³

While the above concepts can be applied to the problem of hair and headgear in a general way, specific literature on a relationship between Afro-American cultural experiences and personal adornment is limited. However, there has been occasional recognition of the relevancy of research on the aspects of Afro-American dress and adornment.

Mintz addressed the question of the African elements in the importance of headgear to Afro-Americans. He suggested that "the possibility exists that a complex of ideas about covering the head may be African, even if the specific kinds of coverings, and . . . the original circumstances, the contexts, can no longer be traced."⁴

Sieber supported this idea, and proposed a serious survey of African hair arrangements. He stated that this aspect of the background of Afro-Americans represented a significant cultural expression, and referred to the sculpture of tribal Africa as an important resource in an historical analysis of African forms in the adornment of the hair and head.⁵

Staples issued an appeal for new perspectives on the study of dress and personal adornment unique to Afro-American cultures, with an emphasis on Black identity and the connections to the African tradition.⁶

Williams concurred with this position and suggested a need for the skills of the humanistic scholar to expand research of the textiles and dress of the Afro-American beyond its present limited themes and methods, which emphasize deprivation, compensatory roles, atypical descriptions and caste differentiation.⁷

The need for such research was underscored by Mintz and Price as they called for "more subtle, in-depth research" on the evolution of cultural forms among Afro-Americans. They speculated that the distinctive nature of early Afro-American settings may have stamped these cultures with certain general features that continue to influence their contemporary characteristics.⁸

The problem of the isolation of such a "total-culture" style was discussed by Kroeber, who recognized the theoretical importance and justification of such a topic:

Any whole-culture style that may be discoverable must be regarded as composite in origin, secondary, and derivative. If . . . the total style is posited as primary, we are inevitably deriving the well-known particular styles in the culture from a much less well-known, more unsure and vague origin. . . . The full significance which the several segmentary styles have may not be evident until all their interactions have been traced and the sum total of qualities in the culture begins to be visible.⁹

The difficulties outlined by Kroeber are eminently applicable to a study of stylistic interpretations among Afro-Americans. In fact, the interaction of the African, European and American components of Afro-American dress and adornment denotes the complex nature of the evolution of the stylistic forms.

In his pioneering work on the role of clothing among the larger social issues, Hartmann outlined the complexities of personal adornment. He suggested a need for a broader approach to research in Clothing and Textiles and proposed new interactions between clothing and culture, grounded in an interdisciplinary concept.¹⁰

In a discussion of clothing and ornament, Hoebel saw concern with the coiffure as being one of the most intense interests of mankind. He observed that certain hairstyles that are widespread in Africa could frequently be seen on Black American children (Plate I). He defined this practice as an "apparent style convention" and qualified the statement with a footnote which mentioned that no investigation had been done into the possible functional significance of hair arrangements among Black children.¹¹

The possible significance of the manipulation of the hair and headgear among Afro-Americans was also recognized by Herskovits. The importance of the headkerchief to the costume was noted as he remarked that a point well worth investigating could be the inner significance given to kerchief designs among Negro women in various regions of the New World.¹²

The concept of "cultural focus" advanced by Herskovits rendered an eloquent rationale for an analysis of the management and adornment of the hair and head as the locus of expressive behavior among Afro-Americans:

Every people tend at a given time in their history to lay stress on . . . those aspects of their culture which are of

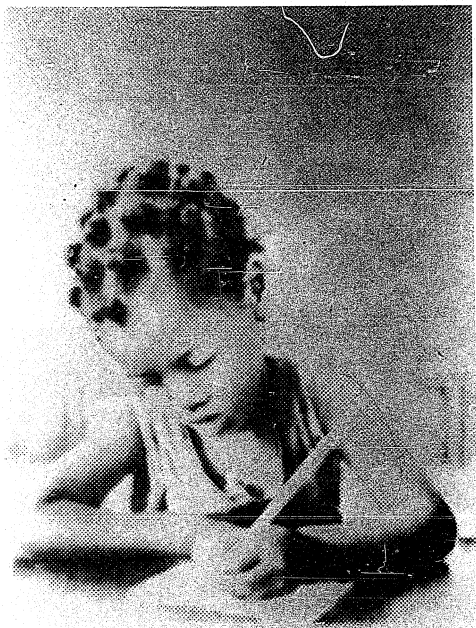


Plate I

greatest interest to them; and . . . in a situation of cultural contact where free choice is not allowed, they retain elements of the focal aspects, either in unchanged or reinterpreted form, more tenaciously than those of other aspects.¹³

Descriptive Accounts
of Historical and Contemporary Significance

In order to understand those factors which influenced the evolution of stylistic interpretations in Afro-American culture, the investigation of contemporary motivations and behavior must take place against an historical background. The past is essential to any interpretation of the present, just as the present may shed light on the past as well as the future.

The African origin of the use of hair and headgear as expressive media was supported by observations of travelers to Africa, beginning as early as the fifteenth century.¹⁴ European accounts revealed a fascination with the intricate hair arrangements and the highly inventive styles of headgear, and noted the relationship of these forms of adornment to status and levels of authority (Plate II). The use of the hair and headgear for aesthetic expression was noted in many early descriptive accounts of Africa.¹⁵ These accounts of attire and adornment by chroniclers of Africa are not at variance with descriptions of twentieth-century attire in many sub-Saharan societies, since much of contemporary African dress and adornment is traditional in form and style.¹⁶



Plate II

The complicated coiffures and headgear still seen in parts of Africa testify to a continued preoccupation with the hair and head dating back to the remote past. Terra cotta heads, which have been identified with the Nok culture in Nigeria as being about two thousand years old, show careful attention to detail in the decoration of the hair, as do most extant African works of sculpture (Plate III).¹⁷ In fact, Armstrong stated that "normal" in the sense of African sculpture refers to a classificatory model where the head is typically larger than life (Plate IV).¹⁸

Van Gerven reported the excavation of the head of a young girl whose hair was braided into cornrows, said to be a favored style among Nubian women of the late Christian period. These archaeological finds in Ancient Nubia, Egypt have been dated from 550-750 A.D. (Plate V).¹⁹

A photographic essay by Diby Yao illustrated the continuing interest in hair styling in Africa. This work portrayed the hairdressing specialists in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, where hairstyles are referred to by special names and are classified as "small artwork." The creative ability of the hairdresser is seen in the braided geometric designs; some inventive figures may even trace the name of the client in the coiffure (Plate VI).²⁰

In describing the "arts of the body" in Africa, Leiris noted the great care that is taken with coiffure and styles which vary according to the age, sex and status of the individual. Certain circumstances may require the wearing of some special, highly complicated headgear, which Leiris described as "always impressive."²¹



Plate III

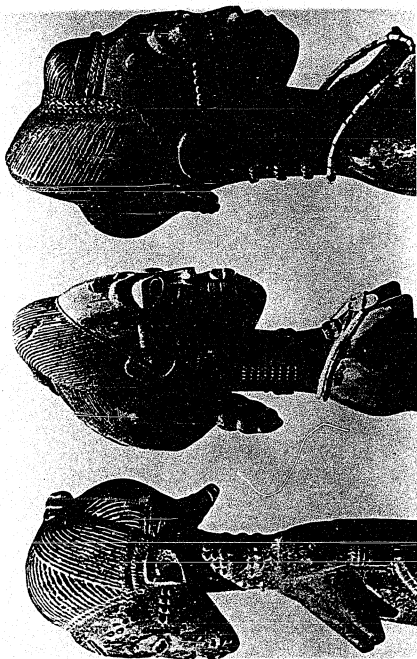


Plate IV



Plate V

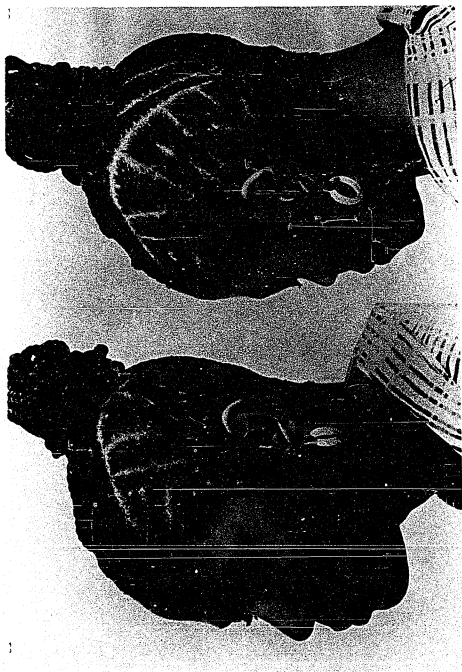


Plate VI

These manifestations of African ideology extend into the stylistic modes of daily attire. According to Cordwell, the wrapping of the gele, or head tie, is of major importance among the Yoruba. This headgear serves as an instrument of aesthetic personal expression and symbolic implication for the women. Among Yoruba men, costume variation occurs mostly in the head covering, with aesthetic success related to the manner in which the headgear is worn. Among the Bini, the head tie is not as important nor as complicated. Cordwell observed that this may occur because, until the very recent past, the Bini women wore elaborate hair styles and had more interest in coiffure than in head covering.²²

In certain areas of Africa, traditions and customs surrounding the manipulation of the hair have survived the pressure of European influences. The women and girls of some Angolan tribes wear the most intricate and ornate coiffures, with the hair being set with mud and decorated with hundreds, or even thousands, of beads of all colors (Plate VII).²³

It may be a manifestation of this type to which Puckett referred when he described the African process of mixing a plastic material with the hair in order to maintain a "highly fantastic coiffure." He tied this to the use of unguents used for hair straightening among Negro women of the South in the 1930's.²⁴

The quest for a method of altering the texture of hair among Blacks was reported as early as 1859 in the New York Times. A news feature described a demonstration of "hair unkinking" and the attitudes of the spectators. The account mentioned the presence of a Black woman "who

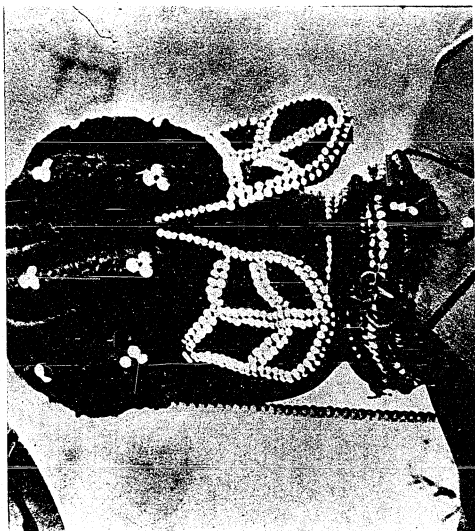


Plate VII

announced that she wouldn't desert her race to get straight hair even though she had "Indian features".²⁵

Madame C. J. Walker became one of the first Black millionaires in America with her invention of the thermal straightening comb in 1905. Her success gave testimony to the widespread desire of Afro-Americans to obtain a process for the alteration of the hair texture. Several biographers of Madame Walker perceived her process as a mechanism seized upon by Afro-Americans in their efforts to decrease their African characteristics.²⁶

Correspondences between African and Afro-American hair forms have been noted in other field studies. Some of the earliest field work was that of Herskovits, who mentioned the similarities among patterns of hair braiding in areas of the New World and the ubiquitousness of the art in West Africa and the West Indies. Herskovits commented on the correspondences to be found between the names given to styles of tying the kerchief in Guiana and those styles recorded among the Ashanti of West Africa.²⁷ His observations in Haiti described the retention, in unchanged form, of African fashions of hair tying, and he remarked that the styles were not named as in other parts of the world and Africa.²⁸

Also of interest was the fact that both Herskovits and Hoebel noted the prevalence of the braiding and wrapping of hair among young Afro-American girls. Herskovits observed this technique in Haiti in the 1930's while Hoebel described it in the United States in the 1950's.²⁹

The interest in the adornment of the head as part of the "cultural baggage" which the Africans brought with them to the New World was vividly expressed in a memorable account by Stedman:

No sooner is a Guinea ship arrived, than all the slaves are led upon deck . . . and their hair shaved in different figures of stars, half-moons, &c. which they do the one to the other, (having no razors) by the help of a broken bottle and without soap.³⁰

The fact that such interest in adornment could survive the Middle Passage documented its significance in the African ethos (Plate VIII).

The literature on New World slavery is extensive. However, few historians give attention to the management of the hair and headgear among the slaves. In a review of early accounts of attitudes towards slavery, Jordan indicated that hair texture and skin color were among the attributes cited in the developing rationale for the enslavement of Africans.³¹

Valuable primary data appeared in the editions of the Slave Narratives by Rawick.³² In a work based on these slave accounts, Escott observed that remembrances of ex-slaves which related to clothing and adornment centered on complaints about footwear and descriptions of hairstyles. In outlining the bases of Black culture, Escott saw the purest elements of African culture being manifested in the areas of dress and recreation, with the emphasis in matters of dress being expressed in the management and adornment of the hair and head. He stated, "For both men and women, Africans had distinctive ways of wearing their hair which neither Indians nor Europeans shared."³³ This



Plate VIII

distinguishing behavior among the slaves in regard to hair management was best expressed in the memories of a former slave:

In dem days all de darky wimmens wore dey hair in string . . .
 . some o' de old men had short plaits o' hair.³⁴

Price and Price observed the continuity of this style of adornment of the head among the Maroons of Suriname and recounted the names of early twentieth-century braiding patterns for both men and women. They noted the fashion of adorning the hair with decorative objects; in some cases the styles combined fluffed or tasseled sections of hair.³⁵

Cunard assigned an African origin to hairstyles seen among Afro-American women in Jamaica:

The women's hair is done in a wealth of twists and knobs and knots and curls--a perfect series in which no two seem alike in style but all suggest direct parentage to Africa.³⁶

Generally, headgear was not regulated by the many sumptuary laws governing the choice and use of clothing by the slaves. Chase speculated that a certain amount of latitude may have been allowed the Africans in the choice of hairstyle and headgear, even though their clothing was regulated by the imposition of sumptuary laws in many parts of the New World.³⁷

One exception to this was recorded in Louisiana in 1786. Niro, the Spanish Governor, denounced the impropriety of alliances between certain Black women and Caucasian men. He sought to make these women, many of whom were phenotypically Caucasian, less attractive by ordering all free

women of color to tie their hair in a tignon or head tie (Plate IX)³⁸

The symbolic significance of the tignon in slave attire was described by Cable:

To add a tignon--a Madras handkerchief twisted into a turban--was to give high gentility; the number of tignons was a measure of wealth . . . 39

The importance of the headkerchief among Afro-Americans could be seen in the frequency of its appearance in many parts of the New World. Selected descriptions of this form of headgear indicated its diffusion throughout the slave-holding areas of the United States and the Caribbean (Plate X).⁴⁰

Herskovits illustrated some of the methods of tying and the naming of designs for the headkerchief among Negro women of Suriname, and noted that this form of headgear had antecedents in African stylistic modes (Plate XI).⁴¹

Some observers described the headgear of slave women and remarked on the types of headkerchiefs worn by field slaves and house slaves. The use of the headkerchief as a non-verbal communicator of status was recorded in one pre-emancipation account that made note of the importance of rank and precedence among the slaves in Charleston, where the married women were distinguished by a "peculiarly-tied kerchief they wore upon their heads."⁴²



Plate IX

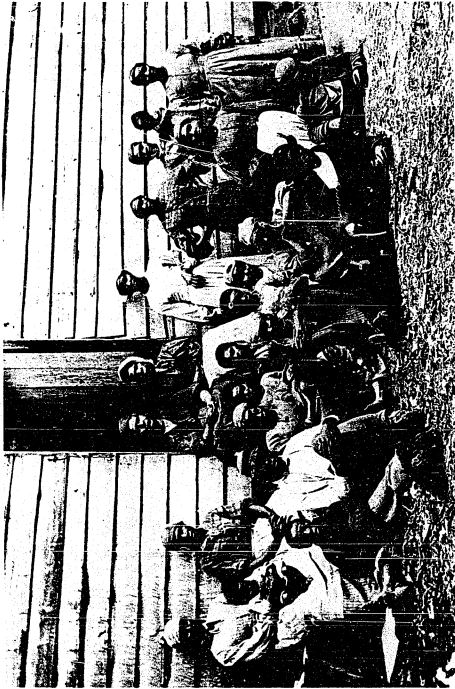


Plate X

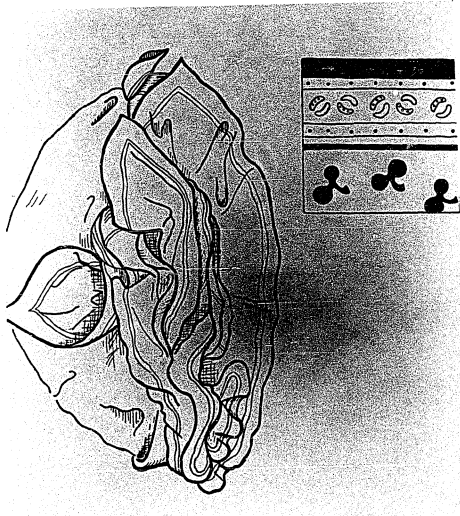


Plate XI

The detailed description of a mulatto given by a northern visitor to New Orleans in the 1850's indicated the persistence of this distinctive headgear, even when the attire was of the prevailing mode:

Her head was surmounted by an orange and scarlet handkerchief bound about it Turkish-turban fashion . . . her dress was plain colored silk made in the costliest manner . . . She had a pair of magnificent eyes, and a face of surprising and unlooked-for-beauty. . . .⁴³

In a discussion of clothing allocations on plantations in Barbados, Handler documented the use of bandannas or handkerchiefs as rewards to slaves.⁴⁴ This custom was also observed on southern plantations in the United States, where handkerchiefs were sometimes awarded to the slaves who picked the most cotton; bandannas were also used as gifts at Christmas.⁴⁵ The bandanna was one of the few purchased items of slave clothing. This article had achieved sufficient importance for an absentee planter to write from Paris to his overseer in 1847 with instructions to purchase enough handkerchiefs so that each female slave on his plantation could have one.⁴⁶

While purchases of "store" clothing for slaves was rare, one account listed the purchase of four dozen handkerchiefs for six dollars in 1856.⁴⁷ An observer noted that slave women on one plantation were given, in addition to the basic allocation of clothing, "a good supply of handkerchiefs."⁴⁸ The handkerchief was the only item of attire that could be classified as a non-essential addition to the minimal wardrobe afforded the slaves.

In a chapter devoted to the clothing of slaves, Genovese called attention to the "historical irony" surrounding the use of headkerchiefs or bandannas. He discussed the possible African origins of this form of headgear and suggested that it appeared more strongly in those areas of the New World where African values were more firmly retained. He also commented on the differing perceptions between the slaves and the planters in regard to this item of attire:

Carried into the twentieth century in the rural South, it became a mark of servility . . . Yet originally, nothing so clearly signified African origins and personal pride . . . The willingness of the whites to view the slaves' headkerchiefs with pleasure and of later Blacks with disdain stems . . . from their association with house slaves and especially with plantation Mammies. The Mammies of the South Carolina low country marked their status by wearing white turbans, and the house slaves . . . by wearing brightly colored, tastefully wound headkerchiefs. But throughout the South, even the field women wore them if they could. In some areas, headkerchiefs became the sign of a married woman.⁴⁹

The importance of the white turban as an identifying symbol for Black women with significant roles in New World societies was reinforced by Herskovits, who cited the white turban as a mark of the mambu, or priestess, in Haiti (Plate XII).⁵⁰

Another manifestation of the reciprocal nature of the diffusion of headgear among Blacks and its descriptive terminology in New World societies was found in a letter from one of the contraband camps in Virginia during the Civil War. The writer stated, "When the negro-women come here they almost universally wear upon their heads either Tubs or Boilers,⁵¹ whether their bodies are clothed or unclothed."⁵²



Plate XII

An early nineteenth-century observer in Suriname was also impressed by the headgear of a free Black woman:

A clean white handkerchief is tied round the head, something like a turban; on top of this is placed a little black, red or yellow hat, so exceedingly small, as if made for a little infant, which is stuck on its place by means of a long pin, run through it and the turban.⁵³

Cunard wrote of the headkerchief and its significance in the Jamaican markets of the 1930's:

What are they selling? . . . those superb "Jamaica cloths," at 1s. 6d. a square yard, which are made at Manchester in England. All the women wear them turbaned about their heads. You begin to wonder what these blue, yellow and red striped squares cost to produce in Manchester, begin to suspect the profit made out of these rough cottons, but of course you will never see one in England; they are reserved for export to the West Indian colonies. They are not just kerchiefs, they have the standing of a dress, 1s. 6d. being a sum to the black worker.⁵⁴

On the island of Martinique, the tying of the head covering assumed a highly symbolic role among the women of color. Many travelers to the island reported on this unique form of headgear. One of the most eloquent was Lafcadio Hearn:

Some of these fashions suggest the Orient: they offer beautiful audacities of color contrast; and the full-dress coiffure, above all, is so strikingly Eastern that one might be tempted to believe it was first introduced into the colony by some Mohammedan slave. It is merely an immense Madras handkerchief, which is folded about the head with admirable art, like a turban; one bright end pushed through at the top in front, being left sticking up like a plume. Then this turban, always full of bright canary color, is fastened with golden brooches, one in front and one at either side. . . and whatever be the colors of the costume, which vary astonishingly, the coiffure must be yellow - brilliant,

flashing yellow. The turban is certain to have yellow stripes or yellow squares. ⁵⁵

While some specialists in Martiniquan costume have readily identified the similarities between African head ties and the Madras, other cultural forces may have combined in its evolution. Morton related the Martiniquan turban design to a form of Oriental turban popular in France during the Empire and Directoire Periods.⁵⁶ Photographs and drawings depicted several versions of this turban on European women of that era (Plate XIII).⁵⁷ While this version was dissimilar in form to the tignon, both treatments required the manipulation of fabric to form a headdress.

The African significance accorded to headgear may have been augmented by exposure to the penchant for elaborate headdress which marked European costume from the Renaissance on through the latter part of the eighteenth century. The naming of designs for headgear in some areas of Africa had its counterpart in this description of eighteenth-century French women:

Anything could be taken as a pretext--current affairs and events, notorious law suits or successful plays were transformed into the enormous hairstyles to give a new combination each day . . . [headdresses] were worn according to the time of day or the wearer's social rank and occupation.⁵⁸

Another illustration of the fascination which the coifs of Martinique held for observers was revealed in this account from the nineteenth century:



Plate XIII

Little girls, maidens, matrons, and ancient dames, all of them wear gorgeous bandanna handkerchiefs, built upon their heads with scrupulous care in intricate folds, and all these coifs, . . . are as gaudy, if not as tasteful and unutterably lovely, as Easter bonnets.⁵⁹

In explaining the exclusivity of the Madras to women of color, Bontemps, a contemporary historian of Martiniquan costume, discussed the historical functions and meanings of the hairstyles and headdresses among Black women of eighteenth and nineteenth-century Martinique:

The varied manner in which the head was tied indicated status, occupation, personality and disposition. Styles of headgear were fixed by tradition for the cane cutter, the laundress, the courtesan, the nurse, the field worker and the house servant. Personal style and whim decreed the subtle variations in each design. The tilt of the headdress, as well as the number of points in the arrangement functioned as communicators of mood, marital status or availability. Certain types of headdresses for specific occasions or ceremonies were the chaudieres, or "boilers" (Plate XIV).⁶⁰

The generational qualities of the use of adornment as a communicative medium were referred to by Wagner in a discussion of the geography of art and human expression:

No doubt, all such modalities of expression belong to culture, descending from generation to generation as inherited significances, intelligible to a people and reproduced by them onward through time, long persisting.⁶¹

When these modalities of expression are applied to Afro-American societies, the historical significances become more complex. In fact, the very term "Afro-American" suggests a combination of cultures under conditions of existence the legacies of which have great consequence in



Plate XIV

all areas of contemporary life. The aptness of the terminology in describing this fusion of cultures was explained by Levine:

The essence of their thought, . . . their culture, owed much to Africa, but it was not purely African; it was indelibly influenced by more than two hundred years of contact on American soil, but it was not the product of an abject surrender of all previous cultural standards in favor of embracing those of the white master. This syncretic blend of old and new, of the African and the Euro-American, resulted in a style which in its totality was uniquely the slaves' own and defined their expressive culture. . . .⁶²

Mintz agreed with this position and suggested that one might look at expressive media among Afro-Americans as continuities with the African past and as evidence of the success of Afro-Americans in conserving cultural materials that could not be conserved in other areas of life.⁶³

Related Studies and References to the Problem

The significance of the ornamental function of personal adornment was emphasized by Lotze, who suggested that bodily adornment serves to distinguish the wearer and to enhance his self-feeling in contrast to those not possessing such marks.⁶⁴ Sanborn agreed with Lotze and observed that hair is one element of the language of adornment that does not have to be obtained from a world external to the body. He extended his comments to describe the ability of the hairdo or headdress to achieve a satisfying sense of increased vertical extension.⁶⁵

The matters of reflective imagery and the effect of the appearance on interactions were analyzed by Stone in a study of empirical evidence of these phenomena. The findings in his investigation revealed the importance of non-verbal signs in the conditions for the interactions. The conclusion was drawn that the self is established, maintained and altered as much by communication of appearance as by other factors. Stone also concluded that a persistent and distinctive mode of adornment may well serve to replace other forms of adornment.⁶⁶

In a discussion of the universality of grooming practices among human societies, Wax considered the plastic manipulation of the body and used permanent waving of the hair to illustrate the dialectic of casualness and control, or manageability.⁶⁷ While he specifically referred to American Caucasian women, the principle of manageability in regard to the hair can be applied to other societies and cultural groupings and has important implications when applied to Afro-Americans.

Among New World Afro-Americans, the question of manageability may be perceived in a different context. Hoebel identified a certain New World symbolism among American Blacks in the matter of hair form, and saw a "passion" for hair straightening as a reflection of the identification of non-kinky hair with the social status of the Caucasian majority.⁶⁸

In a discussion of somatic factors and racism, Hoetink described the socio-aesthetic influence of personal adornment on the perception of human beauty and the effect of this perception on a subordinated racial group. Hoetink made the assumption that a correlation existed between

the interest of the individual and the aesthetic demands on his physical type which could be complied with.⁶⁹

In an analysis of the psychological trauma of enslavement, Mintz and Price speculated that the repressive and dehumanizing aspects of slavery encouraged the slaves to cultivate any characteristic or device which served to differentiate one individual from another. They gave examples of such sartorial details as "the cock of a hat or the use of a cane."⁷⁰

Herskovits, in a study of anthropometric measurements among Blacks, remarked on the difficulty of studying hair form in American Blacks because of the use of ointments and hair-straightening devices by both men and women. He referred to the contemporary terminology and the use of the terms "good" and "stubborn" as descriptive of straight and tightly curled hair, respectively.⁷¹

In some of the descriptive community studies published on Afro-Americans, references to appearance were generally tied to the issue of identity or used as culturally distinguishing characteristics and stratifying mechanisms.

Dollard used the elements of personal adornment to describe the castes and classes observed among Blacks in a southern town in the 1930's. Hair was not specifically investigated, but the attitudes toward standards of beauty revealed a preoccupation with norms associated with the physical attributes of Caucasians.⁷²

Powdermaker recorded the importance of the "beauty" business in a southern community in the late 1930's. She attributed this thriving business to the nature of the cosmetic treatments, hair straightening and skin bleaching. This observation was presented as support for the assertion that "beauty in Cottonville is white."⁷³

Lewis recognized dress and grooming among the cultural complexes existing in a Black southern community in the 1950's. He related the occupational homogeneity to the dominant styles of wearing apparel. The suggestion was made that homogeneity in color among the inhabitants could explain the emphasis on hair as a differentiating factor in the criteria for female beauty and the importance of this feature in sexual selection. Lewis gave more emphasis to hair and hair care than to any other aspect of the grooming complex. Quotations from respondents to interviews cited hair as crucial to perceptions of beauty; respondents often included descriptions of hair in epithets of derision or self-deprecation.⁷⁴

In other literature which dealt with the larger themes of Afro-American life, there were references to the role of personal adornment in assessments of Black identity. The methodology used in the study of the subject matter was as varied as the manner of approach to this aspect of expressive culture.

As early as 1925, Johnson used the medium of advertising in a study of the press as a reflection of social forces in Black life. The frequency of advertisements for hair straighteners was examined and conclusions were drawn on the extensive use of products for the

alteration of hair texture among Blacks. The question was posed as to the permanence of hair straightening in Black culture and the prevalence of this procedure among the more "race conscious" Blacks. Johnson saw conflicting forces in behavior and attitudes toward the practice of hair straightening and its effect on the perceived chances for success in the larger society.⁷⁵

The same methodology used by Johnson was repeated over fifty years later in a study by Condie and Christiansen. They measured the impact of the Black Power movement and the accompanying shifts in identity within the Black community by analyzing the incidence of advertisements for hair straighteners, bleaching creams, Afro hair models and Afro wigs. The investigation was done with Ebony magazine from 1949 through 1972. This technique produced data which pointed to the preponderance of hair and hair product advertisements, while furnishing considerable evidence in support of a significant shift in the identity structure of Afro-Americans. The Black Power movement was cited as an important causal factor in effecting this change. The hypothesis was supported most strongly by the total absence of advertisements for the Afro prior to 1967.⁷⁶

In a projective study, Williams used photographs to test the acceptance of the "natural" hair style as a symbol of identity among Blacks. The subjects in the survey were elementary school children who indicated a greater percentage of acceptance for the "natural" or Afro style as a symbol of identity. However, an inconsistency did exist between their attitudes and their personal behavior when they were asked

to choose a style for themselves or members of their families. The author concluded that a negative reaction was established to the "Black is Beautiful" campaign.⁷⁷

Isaacs commented on the role of hair texture in the system of personal, social and group relations among Blacks. He spoke of the pervasiveness of the institution of color and its effect on the institution of color caste which raised "whiteness" to a high value in all aspects of life. The opinion was ventured that the use of artificial means, such as hair straighteners, was an attempt to close the gap between the degree of physical "Negroness" and the aspirations to achieve those qualities perceived as acceptable in the society. However, some respondents interviewed in this study foresaw a trend away from hair "conking" or straightening.⁷⁸

This recognition of the pervasive force of "whiteness" on "blackness" was noted by several scholars, although there was some disagreement as to whether it represented a form of racial self-hatred, an accommodation to the process of acculturation, or a combination of these forces.

One proponent of the accommodation approach was Johnson, who wrote on the effects of race prejudice. He saw the attempts of Afro-Americans to circumvent the handicaps of their physical attributes as manifestations of a natural defense mechanism, and cautioned that "any other deductions as to motivations behind hair straightening and skin bleaching are derogatory to the Negro and further the Nordic superiority complex."⁷⁹

Clark believed that the preoccupation with hair straighteners illustrated a tragic aspect of American racial prejudice--the belief of Blacks in their own inferiority:

In recent years Negro men and women have rebelled against the constant struggle to become white and have given special emphasis to their "Negroid" features and hair textures in a self-conscious acceptance of "negritude" - a wholehearted embracing of the African heritage. But whether a Negro woman uses hair straightener or . . . highlights her natural hair texture by flaunting au naturel styles, . . . [she] is still reacting primarily to the pervasive factor of race . . . It is still the white man's society that governs the Negro's image of himself.⁸⁰

One of the most eloquent critics of the self-hatred approach was Murray, who felt that processed (straightened) hair implied no less emphasis on Black identity than the Afro style. He relied on the fact that "Africans . . . were also slicking their hair down with mud and other ingenious pomades . . . long before white Europeans arrived as agents of oppression."⁸¹

There is evidence that crises of identity occurred in Afro-American individuals as their perceptions of themselves altered. A vivid description by Malcolm X detailed the ritual of hair "conking" or straightening, and his subsequent rejection of the process and its implications:

I'd seen some pretty conks, but when it's the first time on your own head, the transformation, after a lifetime of kinks, is staggering . . . This was my first really big step toward self-degradation; when I endured all of that pain, literally burning my flesh with lye, in order to cook my natural hair until it was limp, to have it look like a white man's hair. I had joined that multitude of Negro men and women in America who are brainwashed into believing that the Black people are

"inferior"--and white people "superior"--that they will even violate and mutilate their God-created bodies to try to look "pretty" by white standards . . . It makes you wonder if the Negro has completely lost his sense of identity, lost touch with himself.⁸²

The importance of the perceptions of identity to the management of the hair among Afro-American women in the United States was supported in case studies reported by psychiatrists Grier and Cobb. They analyzed the impact of the lifelong ritual of hairdressing on Black women patients, and related the process to the achieving of acceptability rather than beautification:

Thus the Black woman is never free of the painful reminder that she must be transformed from her natural state to some other state in order to appear presentable to her fellow man . . . It is against this endless circle of shame, humiliation, and the implied unacceptability of one's own person that a small but significant number of Black women have turned to the "natural hairdo"; no hot irons, no pressing combs, no oils, but a soft, black, gentle cloche of cropped velvet. The effect is so engaging and feminine, and . . . so psychologically redemptive, that we can only wonder why it has taken them so long, and why even yet there are so few.⁸³

White suggested that the inception of the trend toward the Afro occurred with the arrival of African diplomats and entertainers, along with the adoption of the style by a few American singers and actors. The opinion was advanced that "the darker peoples of the world are making a statement wordlessly and fervently by the adoption of a hairstyle which attempts to communicate a sense of personal liberation."⁸⁴

Much commentary centered around stylistic interpretations of the hair among Blacks in the emerging militant atmosphere of the 1960's.

Weisbord spoke of the "African Renaissance" of the period and cited the Afro hair style as one of its manifestations. He recognized the propitious climate of the 1960's for the rising popularity of the Afro, as the issue of hirsuteness became a vehicle for political statements by many young Americans (Plate XV). However, Weisbord related two incidents that illustrated the lack of universal acceptance of the "natural" trend. He cited an interview with proprietors of Black-owned beauty salons who reported that nine out of ten of their customers ignored the Afro look and continued to request hair straightening in some form. He also pointed out the initial unwillingness of the United States military authorities to allow Black recruits to wear the Afro, and the subsequent retreat of the Marine Corps on this issue in 1968 and 1971. This study by Weisbord supported the studies of Williams and others who held that the movement toward the revitalization of "African" hair forms attained only limited acceptance among the majority of Afro-Americans.⁸⁵

Fairservice agreed with the possibility of an African source for the diffusion of the Afro hair style, and tied this style to personal identity. He related this likelihood to the fundamental differences between Eastern and Western costume:

In general, Western costume and adornment offer very little in the expression of ethnic origin or of aesthetic inspiration. The emphasis is on conformity and adherence to the current style. Blacks in America who seek identity have tended to adopt the symbols of an historical identity in certain aspects of dress and adornment. The most dramatic of these symbols may be seen in the adoption of African hair styles.⁸⁶



Plate XV

Kilson examined the legitimation of ethnicity in American life and the dynamics of this process as conceptualized by Blacks. He reflected on the importance of the participation of middle-class Blacks in anti-White activism and their role in all aspects of ethnocentric revitalization, and cited preference for the Afro as an example of middle-class support for anti-White political activism.⁸⁷

A poll by Goldman supported this argument. The results of a question regarding the Afro hair style showed that forty-five percent of all Blacks favored this style in 1969. Fifty-eight percent of middle-income Northern Blacks favored the style, as compared with forty-two percent of low-income Northern Blacks.⁸⁸

Some contradiction to the Goldman poll was shown in an investigation by Cooke among middle-lower and upper-lower income Blacks in Chicago. The results of his field work among urban Blacks revealed the "natural" or "bush" hair style as a symbol of pride in self and heritage and a conscious affirmation by Black people of strength, unity and control of their lives and destinies. One practical aspect of the "bush" style was suggested by an informant, who suggested that gang members found it helpful to have a "bush" on the top of the head to cushion the blows received in fights or from the police.⁸⁹

Controversy over the adoption of the Afro was not limited to American Blacks. Lowenthal, in a chapter on social and racial identity in West Indian societies, reported that hair straightening was practically universal, even in rural areas of the Caribbean. He stated that "almost every West Indian woman 'fixes' her hair with a hot comb

and desires a more elaborate treatment as a first luxury . . . the Afro style popular in Black America is viewed askance by West Indians embarrassed by the exposure of "bad" hair."⁹⁰

This disparaging attitude had a counterpart in the United States, according to Bovoso. She commented on the role of hair in "political dressing" as being representative of the vast range of personal expression utilized by Blacks:

In the '60s when white people saw Black people's real hair for the first time and Black people saw their own real hair for the first time, everyone was profoundly offended.⁹¹

In a saga of Black activism in Greensboro, North Carolina, Chafe made note of the fact that the most rigid dress code in the public high schools was maintained at the Black high school. Early in 1969 female students had been suspended for wearing the Afro hair style to school. Chafe stated, "Many faculty members saw the ideas of 'Black Power' and [Black] culture as undercutting traditional academic standards."⁹²

The intensity of the reaction to hair styles among Blacks remains in force, according to a story widely circulated on the wire services in 1981. A Black female television announcer was suspended from an Oakland, California station because she appeared on the air with her hair in a style described as "braided cornrows." The reporter insisted that the hairdo was a reflection of her racial pride and heritage and refused to change it. The general manager of the station credited the woman with having a "pleasing appearance without the cornrows." After negotiations with the union, a compromise was reached whereby the basic

hairstyle would be retained, but without the multi-colored beads that had been woven into the ends of the shoulder-length braids. A photograph of the reporter in question portrayed a hairstyle almost identical to that popularized ~~by~~ some Caucasian women following the publicity given to the wearing of such a hairstyle by the actress Bo Derek in the motion picture, "10" (Plates XVI and XVII).⁹³

In another case reported in the media, a New York federal judge ruled against a Black female airline ramp attendant who was barred from wearing her hair in cornrows on the job she had held for ten years. The judge made his ruling on the grounds that the hairstyle, similar to that worn by Bo Derek, was not a natural style but the result of "artifice." The judge stated, "If the airline had banned the Afro hairstyle it would have been quite another matter, with very pointed racial dynamics and consequences."⁹⁴

An example of the negative significance attached to the hair and its communicative powers was reported from the Caribbean. On the island of Dominica, a black communal group known as the "Dreads" rebelled against the influx of white cultural influences. They sported tangled braided hair smeared with gummy okra paste. The Dominican government moved against the rebels and part of the punishment, in addition to the jail term, was the cutting of their hair, a major identifying feature.⁹⁵

Not all writers and critics were negatively impressed by the impact of the hair styles and headgear adopted by some Afro-Americans. Wolfe defined "Radical Chic" as observed in an encounter with the Black Panthers:



Plate XVI



Plate XVII

Christ, if the Panthers don't know how to get it all together . . . the tight pants, the tight black turtle-necks, . . . Afros. But real Afros, not the ones that have been shaped and trimmed like a topiary hedge and sprayed until they have a sheen like acrylic wall-to-wall-- but like funky, natural, scraggly . . . wild . . . The Panther wives were sitting in the first two rows with their Yoruba headdresses on. . .

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Beginning about 1970, a review of the periodical literature indicated a trend toward a modification of the basic Afro style. It was also during this period that the African-inspired head tie, referred to above by Wolfe, began to increase in popularity among Black women (Plate XVIII). Whereas the Afro or "natural" emerged in the 1960's as an expression of Black pride, the cornrow and its variations represented a more stylized and individualized approach to personal adornment in the 1970's. One commentator correlated the waning of the Afro with increased security of identity and achievement of some political goals among Blacks, and called attention to combination styles such as the "Afro-Puff" and the "Afro-Shag," as well as the return to the familiar straightening by chemical or thermal procedures. (Plate XIX). This account quoted a popular New York hairdresser as having remarked, "Afros are as out of date as plantation bandannas."⁹⁷ In the rash of publicity attendant to the cornrow style following its adoption by some Caucasian women, another Black hairdresser ventured the opinion that "the [braided] look is totally passé for the Black woman, except for a certain disco crowd."⁹⁸



Plate XVIII



Plate XIX

Following its original appearance in modifications of the Afro, the cornrow style began to receive recognition in the media. By 1973 this style had achieved acclaim which persisted during the decade (Plate XX).

Graham reported the revival of the cornrow style and its African origins; however, she mentioned the lack of universal acceptance among Afro-Americans. She interviewed one Black entertainer who recalled the painful experience of having her hair cornrowed as a child and who wore an Afro wig, even though her real hair was straightened.⁹⁹

Miller reported the results of an informal poll among college students who also recalled their aversion to the cornrow style as children, but who have presently adopted it. One student remembered the popularity of the style in rural Georgia. The question of manageability was raised, with cornrows being discussed as an alternative to the too-long Afro. The matter of the expression of Black pride was refuted by one respondent who stated, "Blackness is a state of mind. It's not that we as a people have to wear our hair in a certain way to show that we think Black. I wear the cornrow because I think it's beautiful."¹⁰⁰

During the mid-1970's, several instructional books appeared which explained and illustrated the techniques for achieving this style. One such work by Thomas and Bullock showed variations of the Afro along with the variations of the cornrow. The styles were described as "expressions of a new self-view or self-definition among Black women." The styles were based upon traditional African modes, and most of them were given African names. Some styles had names that were descriptive of their silhouette or technique, such as "Bell," "Bush-n-Braid," or



Plate XX

"Afro-Pyramid." Several of the illustrations typified the transitional stages from the Afro to the more stylized cornrow treatment (Plate XXI).¹⁰¹ Subsequently, several variations of the cornrow style were developed; one such variation included the extension and decoration of the braids (Plate XXII).

Additional variations on the Afro theme included the combination of the Afro with straightened hair and the short Afro styled with a layer of small braids in the front. During the 1970's, both straightened hair and the "Buckwheat" (small braids tied with ribbons) regained their previous popularity. Contributory to the decline of the Afro was the feeling among some Blacks that the look was anything but "natural." As the style emerged from a close-cropped cut to an exaggerated sphere, its maintenance required special combs, conditioners, and sprays. The continuous combing needed to keep an Afro fluffy also caused the hair to become brittle and to break along the hairline. In addition, this massive look was not flattering to all faces.

In spite of its drawbacks, the Afro hairstyle served to reinforce the ego of the Black woman and prepared the way for much of the innovative hair styling that was to follow. The ascendancy and decline of the Afro hairstyle closely paralleled the growth of a new political and racial identity.



Plate XXI



Plate XXVI

Selected Literary Works
of Relevance to the Problem

One of the most revealing sources of cultural attitudes may be found in the literature of a people. The following examples testify to the important roles of hair and headgear in the lifeways of Afro-Americans.

A work of fiction for children explained the symbolism of the cornrow hair style in Africa and the continuities inherent in the naming of the designs:

Look around and you will see the old, old symbol
that we now call cornrowed hair . . .
You see, the spirit of the symbol
is not changed by time, place, class or fame,
an' not even by hate or shame . . .102

Murray wrote of her childhood experiences and recalled the constant emphasis placed upon the improvement of one's physical features by the adults of the family:

Brush your hair, child, don't let it get kinky! Cold-cream your face, child, don't let it get sunburned . . . Always the same tune, played like a broken record, robbing one of personal identity. . . . It was color, color, color all the time, color, features and hair . . . To hear people talk, color, features and hair were the most important things to know about a person, a yardstick by which everyone measured everybody else. 103

The dialogue in a short story by Hughes revealed the perception of the significance of hair among Afro-Americans. The mother of the Black protagonist asserts:

"It's just by luck that you even got good hair."
 "What's that got to do with being an American?"
 "A mighty lot," said his mama, "in America."104

The importance attached to hair as an attribute of major significance was eloquently expressed in the poem, "Baby Hair" by Nichols:

I took a peek for the very first time
 At the tiny brown mite on the bed.
 He blinked his eyes and doubled plump fists,
 and I ran to his mother and said,
 "The most cunning baby I ever did see,"
 But she, lying patiently there,
 Touched my arm and with anxious voice
 Whispered, "Does he have good hair?"105

Visual Documentation of Stylistic Features

The visual documentation afforded primary source material for authentication of stylistic manifestations regarding the hair and headgear of Afro-American women. The search for such documentation included the examination of pictures at the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division as well as those deposited in other libraries, archives and private collections.

There was no attempt at verification of all written material; the goal was to show a continuing theme of hair management and adornment among Afro-American women. Early historical accounts were documented by copies of prints and engravings from a variety of sources. Contemporary accounts were supported by photographs obtained from primary and secondary sources. Illustrations of Caribbean modes were included to present the scope of the diffusion of these phenomena in selected New World settings.

In some cases, no visual documentation could be located to illustrate a particular type of hairstyle or headgear referred to in the literature. In other instances, permission for reproduction rights could not be obtained.

The selected examples used in this investigation served as documentary evidence of a continuing preoccupation with hairstyle and headgear by Afro-Americans. These stylistic aspects of adornment have been chronicled by observers and historians, beginning with early travelers to Africa and persisting in contemporary accounts of Afro-American life.

These visual examples were used as documentation to supplement a theoretical approach to the functional and symbolic significance of hair and headgear as distinguishing non-verbal behavior in Afro-American culture.

Summary

This review of literature consisted of five sections. The prior recognition of justification for research into the significance of hair and headgear among Afro-Americans was reported, and the importance of such research was suggested.

Historical and contemporary descriptive accounts supported the continuing significance of the expressive possibilities of hair management and adornment over a period of time extending from enslavement of Africans and throughout contemporary society. Related studies and references from diverse sources underscored the sociological and psychological nuances which accompanied these manifestations of expressive behavior. Selected literary works revealed cultural attitudes among Afro-Americans in regard to the symbolism associated with hair and hair management. Visual examples, included throughout the text of this review, illustrated selected stylistic features of hair management and adornment among Afro-American women.

CHAPTER III

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Development of the Study

The development of this study began in 1974 on the island of Barbados. Thirteen of the prints of Agostino Brunias, an Italian artist of the 1770's, were being exhibited as part of the Cunard collection in the Barbados Museum at St. Ann's Garrison. Brunias spent several years in the West Indies, and his work is among the earliest surviving documentation of West Indian life. The prints portrayed scenes in the life of the slave and free colored population of the islands of Dominica, St. Kitts, St. Domingo, St. Vincent and Barbados.¹⁰⁶

While the styles of dress shown in the prints were of late eighteenth-century European design, the adornment of the heads of the Blacks appeared distinctively non-European. Black and mulatto women were portrayed in varied headgear, including tall cylindrical arrangements of fabric, simple kerchiefs, and several versions of wrapped headgear (Plate XXIII). In fact, every print depicting Blacks showed the models in head coverings of fabric in both simple and complex arrangements. A few prints showed mulatto women wearing the English garden hat of the period perched atop a tall headgear of intricately wrapped fabric. The viewing of these prints generated many questions concerning the origins and implications of the uniquely non-European headgear worn by the Blacks. These questions were then put aside, only to be brought forcefully back to mind during a visit to the island of



Plate XXIII

Martinique in 1977. Extant costumes of nineteenth-century women of color were on display in the Musée Départemental de la Martinique at Fort-de-France. These costumes consisted of an assemblage of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European styles. The headgear accompanying these styles was unquestionably unique in form, design and color (Plate XXIV). Illustrations of hair arrangements among the Black population manifested strong stylistic echoes of African forms as well as an intriguing similarity to styles of hair arrangements worn by some Afro-American children in the United States (Plates XXV and XXVI). Earlier questions which had been raised on the origins and implications of these distinctive forms of headgear and hair management evolved into speculation about the meanings of these similar yet unique methods of adornment among Afro-Americans in societies widely separated by place, time and distance.

Since these aspects of adornment seemed to fall into the category of distinguishing behavior among Afro-Americans in their respective New World settings, there emerged the possibility of an ethnic pattern to these manifestations of personal style. Both hair arrangement and headgear were considered as worthy of investigation for generating hypotheses regarding their functional and symbolic significance among Afro-American women. The persistency of the preoccupation with the manipulation of the hair and the adornment of the head seemed to lend support to the development of a research project that would explore the significant roles of hair and headgear in the acculturative processes among selected groups of New World Afro-Americans.



Plate XXIV



Plate XXV



Plate XXVI

Therefore, based on observation and research, the author determined that hair styles and headgear could be assessed as visible expressions of ethnic identity and non-verbal communication worthy of scholarly investigation.

Comparative Sources

Elements were drawn from the following comparative sources and integrated into the theoretical framework:

1. The review of literature, including (a) orientations and concepts significant to a recognition of the problem; (b) descriptive accounts of historical and contemporary significance; (c) related studies and references to the problem; (d) selected literary works of relevance to the problem; and (e) visual documentation of stylistic features.

2. The qualitative and quantitative analyses of data collected from contemporary Afro-American women on their perceptions, attitudes and behavior in the management and adornment of the hair and head.

3. The life experiences of the writer and insights gained from those experiences.

CHAPTER IV
STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Purpose

The purpose of this exploratory study was to examine the functional and symbolic significance of hair and headgear among Afro-American women. The continuing presence of these aspects of adornment over time and throughout the New World indicated their persistence in Afro-American societies.

Scope and Limitations

Because of the exploratory nature of this investigation, implicit limitations are acknowledged. Randomization in the selection of the sample was not possible. While the findings gained from the data are more descriptive than inferential, these findings may be used to gain an understanding and insight into the significance of hair management and adornment among Afro-American women. Some limitations inherent in the format of the focused interview technique must also be considered. While an exploratory study need not have hypotheses, some assumptions regarding personal adornment among Afro-Americans were formulated as guidelines for the investigation:

1. Commonalities of interest in personal adornment extend across demographic boundaries.
2. Management and adornment of the hair and head serve as aesthetically expressive cultural forms of adornment.
3. Symbolic elements of ethnic identity are retained and utilized through management and adornment of the hair and head.

4. Perceptions, attitudes and behavior concerning management and adornment of the hair and head reflect the unique quality of the Afro-American experience in New World societies.

5. Historical continuities of hair management and adornment can be traced in Afro-American life and culture.

CHAPTER V
ANALYSIS OF CONTEMPORARY DATA

The methodology for the collection of contemporary data is based on the review of literature and the theoretical framework. The discussion of the methodology is divided into the following areas: (1) procedure; (2) analysis of the data; (3) findings; and (4) summary.

Procedure

Selection and Development of the Interview Schedule

A questionnaire was developed and administered to a selected sample in the pilot study. The pre-test data were analyzed to determine frequency patterns and relevance of the variables. Based on findings from these data, the focused interview was selected as a measure for obtaining information on attitudes and behavior of Afro-American women in regard to the management and adornment of the hair and headgear. An interview was used to record demographic data. A copy of the demographic data sheet is in Appendix A.

The test variables were designed to collect data on (1) observable interest in the hair and headgear; (2) beliefs, attitudes and behavior concerning hair and headgear; (3) recognition of cultural expression and ethnic identification as manifested through management of hair and headgear; and (4) preservation of generational patterns in management and adornment of the hair and head.

Categorical questions on observable interest in the hair and headgear were designed to ascertain the level of importance assigned to these aspects in both the self-concept and in assessing the perceptions of others. These questions are 1, 2, 3, 4, Appendix A.

Open-ended questions were posed to respondents regarding personal practices involving hair and headgear. The questions pertained to the time and money expended on the management and adornment of the hair and head, and on other items of attire. These questions are 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, Appendix A.

Categorical and open-ended questions were directed to respondents relating to the selection of styles of hair and headgear. The reasons for choosing a particular hairstyle, hair treatment, or headgear were requested. The possible affirmation or denial of ethnic identity was discussed with respondents. An attempt was made to verify the presence or absence of any individual or collective strategies in the methods or styles chosen for hair management or adornment. These questions are 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, Appendix A.

Respondents were asked to describe their hair and their feelings about these descriptions. These questions are 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, Appendix A.

Respondents were asked to discuss early recollections of hair management and the feelings surrounding these recollections. Categorical and open-ended questions were posed pertaining to generational patterns of hair management and superstitions regarding the

hair and its manipulation. These questions are 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, Appendix A.

A copy of the focused interview schedule is in Appendix A.

Selection of the Sample

A selected sample of one hundred Afro-American women was chosen for this investigation. The sample was a non-random one because of the nature of the investigation. The participants were residents of the Piedmont region of North Carolina. They ranged in age from twenty to ninety. This age range made possible the inclusion of persons who had observed or participated in periods of major change in Afro-American societies in a time frame extending over approximately eighty years.

Method of Data Collection

The data were collected primarily by means of a focused interview. Major considerations in the choice of this technique were the exploratory nature of the study, the known racial identity of the respondents, and the presence of hypothetically significant elements which flowed from that identity. Interviews were conducted by the writer during the summer of 1981. Interviews with selected respondents who appeared to be representative of the sample were recorded on tape for further analysis.

Analysis of the Data

The data were analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively. Qualitative analysis included the isolation of specific variables for statistical treatment. Frequency distributions, means and standard deviations were calculated on all data. Chi-square analysis was used to measure the significance of selected variables. All data were given numerical codes for computer analysis. Statistics obtained from the contemporary data were considered as descriptive rather than inferential because of the composition of the sample and the nature of the research.

Findings

The findings based on data from this selected sample were used, along with other sources, in the formulation of the conclusions. Results of the data collection were used to gain insights and to achieve comprehension on the origins and evolution of manifestations of expressive behavior among Afro-American women in the management and adornment of the hair and head. Informal conversations with respondents following the interviews yielded comments that revealed feelings and attitudes. The nature and variety of these comments precluded quantitative analysis. However, they were considered pertinent to the investigation and were used to supplement the quantitative data in selected categories. Additional dialogue with respondents is found in Appendix C.

Demographic Categories and Distributions

The demographic data were tabulated, using both frequency counts and percentages. Slightly over two-thirds of the sample was between twenty and thirty years of age; the oldest respondent was ninety years of age. Seventy-nine respondents were located in towns or cities with populations of 100,000 or less. Only one respondent listed an income of \$40,000 or over. Thirteen persons did not wish to respond to the question asking them to list their incomes; therefore, the variable income was tabulated using percentage of responses, rather than percentage of cases. Fifty-eight respondents had completed at least twelve years of school; thirty-one of these had at least one year of post-secondary education. Fifty-nine respondents were unmarried; forty-one respondents were married at the time of the interview. The demographic data are presented in Table 1.

Perceptions of Importance Levels Accorded Hair and Headgear

The functional role of hair in personal appearance was judged of primary importance by all groups of respondents in all demographic categories. Head coverings and accessories were assigned a moderate level of importance by respondents in all categories. The importance level of the opinions of others in regard to the management and adornment of the hair and head was substantially lower in all categories, with the lowest level of importance being assigned to opinions of head coverings and accessories. These perceptions of importance levels are presented in Tables 2 and 3.

TABLE 1

DISTRIBUTION OF DEMOGRAPHIC DATA OF SELECTED SAMPLE BY AGE,
RESIDENCE, INCOME, EDUCATION AND MARITAL STATUS

Demographic Variables	Responses	
	Number	Percentage
<u>Age</u>		
20 to 30	67	67
31 to 50	20	20
51 or over	13	13
Total	100	100
<u>Residence by Size of Population</u>		
under 10,000	32	32
10,000 to 50,000	34	34
50,000 to 100,000	13	13
100,000 or over	20	20
Total	100	100
<u>Income</u>		
under \$10,000	22	25.4
\$10,000 to \$25,999	49	56.3
\$26,000 to \$39,999	15	17.2
\$40,000 or over	1	1.1
No answer	13	0.0
Total	100	100.0
<u>Education</u>		
under 12 years	27	27
12 to 15 years	58	58
16 years or over	15	15
Total	100	100
<u>Marital Status</u>		
married	41	41
unmarried	59	59
Total	100	100

TABLE 2

DISTRIBUTION OF LEVELS OF IMPORTANCE ASSIGNED BY SELECTED
 SAMPLE TO HAIR AND HEADGEAR BY AGE, RESIDENCE, INCOME,
 EDUCATION AND MARITAL STATUS

Variables	Extremely Important		Moderately Important		Relatively Unimportant		Unimportant	
	Hair	Headgear	Hair	Headgear	Hair	Headgear	Hair	Headgear
	Number of Respondents							
<u>Age</u>								
20 to 30	52	6	13	26	2	28	0	7
31 to 50	17	10	0	0	0	7	3	3
51 or over	13	8	0	4	0	1	0	0
<u>Residence by Size of Population*</u>								
under 10	27	12	4	13	1	5	0	2
10 to 50	26	5	4	10	1	12	3	7
50 to 100	8	1	5	2	0	9	0	1
100 or over	15	5	2	4	2	7	2	5
<u>Income*</u>								
under \$10	19	2	3	6	0	13	0	1
\$10 to \$25	38	13	10	16	1	4	0	6
\$26 to \$39	11	4	0	0	0	1	0	0
\$40 or over	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
unreported = 13								
<u>Education**</u>								
under 12	20	17	2	9	3	1	2	0
12 to 15	51	20	4	26	2	6	1	4
16 or over	11	5	3	8	1	0	0	4
<u>Marital Status</u>								
married	39	18	1	15	1	6	0	3
unmarried	53	14	2	17	2	16	2	11

*by thousands

**by years

TABLE 3

DISTRIBUTION OF LEVELS OF IMPORTANCE ASSIGNED BY SELECTED
SAMPLE TO OPINIONS OF OTHERS REGARDING HAIR AND HEADGEAR
BY AGE, RESIDENCE, INCOME, EDUCATION AND MARITAL STATUS

Variables	Extremely Important		Moderately Important		Relatively Unimportant		Unimportant	
	Hair Number	Headgear of	Hair Res	Headgear pondents	Hair	Headgear	Hair	Headgear
<u>Age</u>								
20 to 30	19	4	38	18	9	29	1	16
31 to 50	7	11	9	13	4	3	0	3
51 or over	8	8	4	4	0	1	0	0
<u>Residence by Size of Population*</u>								
under 10	16	13	14	9	1	8	1	3
10 to 50	7	0	23	12	4	10	0	12
50 to 100	2	6	5	2	6	4	0	3
100 or over	10	4	0	2	1	10	0	4
<u>Income*</u>								
under \$10	4	5	13	4	5	8	0	5
\$10 to \$25	20	12	22	11	6	17	1	9
\$26 to \$39	3	1	10	5	2	4	0	5
\$40 or over	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
<u>Education**</u>								
under 12	17	10	15	14	0	3	0	0
12 to 15	17	7	32	18	6	22	3	11
16 or over	3	1	9	6	2	5	1	3
<u>Marital Status</u>								
married	25	9	10	14	4	13	1	3
unmarried	23	10	25	13	7	19	4	17

*by thousands

**by years

Personal Practices Involving Hair and Headgear

Eighty-eight respondents spent between five and ten hours per week on care of the hair. This represented approximately ninety percent of the total time spent by these respondents on all aspects of personal care. Expenditures for hair care and hair care products made up one-third to one-half of the average amount of \$30 per month spent on personal care by eighty-four of the respondents. Expenditures for professional hair care were not included, because for most respondents professional services were reserved for special occasions. The mean amount spent on all items of attire by all respondents over a twelve-month period was \$600, with the mean amount of \$35 allocated to headgear. Thus, on an average, head coverings and accessories accounted for approximately six percent of all expenditures for items of attire for all respondents.

Selection of Hairstyles and Expression of Ethnic Identity

An interesting dichotomy developed in the responses to the questions on the choices of hair styles and hair management and the attitudes projected about these choices. Sixty-seven percent of respondents used methods or treatments which altered the texture of the hair, while only thirty-three percent perceived these procedures as expressive of Afro-American identity. Typically "ethnic" styles, which relied on hair manipulation, were worn by a total of only sixteen percent of respondents. However, these styles were perceived as ethnically expressive by fifty-seven percent for the Afro style; forty-two percent for the cornrow style; and twenty percent for the

multi-braided style. Some ambivalence about the alteration of hair texture was noted by one respondent:

When I began to experiment with the cream "relaxers", my hair seemed easy to manage, but when it began to grow out I had a lot of breakage. At this point, disgust began to creep over me and I cut it all off. At least now I have respect for myself.

The quantitative distributions of these responses are presented in Figure 1.

Selection of Headgear and Expression of Ethnic Identity

The patterns which developed in responses to questions on behavior and attitudes concerning headgear indicated some disparity between behavior and attitudes pertaining to those items of headgear perceived as ethnically expressive. Head coverings made from arrangements of fabric, such as kerchiefs, were chosen by twenty-four percent of respondents, while fifty-three percent perceived such items as ethnically expressive. The modal responses in behavior and attitudes appeared in the fabric items of headgear, with less intensity in behavior than in perception.

Constructed items, such as hats and caps, were worn by up to thirty four percent of respondents, but were perceived as expressive of ethnic identity by less than twelve percent of those responding. Among hair accessories, beads used in the hair were worn by only four percent of respondents, while being perceived as expressive of ethnic identity by thirty-one percent of respondents. Combs and barrettes were worn by forty-four percent of respondents; only fifteen percent perceived these

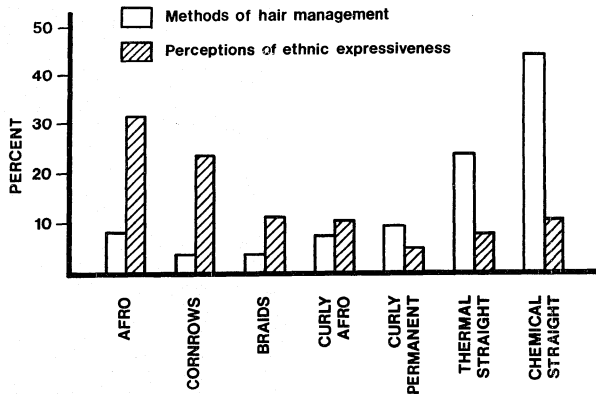


Figure 1. Comparative Distributions of Hair Management Methods Reported by Selected Sample and Perceptions of These Methods as Ethnically Expressive by Percentage of Responses

accessories as ethnically expressive. These responses are represented in Figure 2.

Motivations in Choices of Hairstyles and Headgear

Manageability was the reason cited most consistently by respondents in the choice of a hairstyle, hair treatment, head covering or accessory. The desire to be "in style" was also given as a motivating factor in making decisions regarding hair management and adornment. The desire to effect a change in appearance and to express personality were considered important in the selection of a hairstyle or treatment. The factors of protection and concealment were cited as reasons for the use of head coverings. The accessorizing of a specific costume was second only to manageability in the selection of hair accessories. Combs or barrettes were worn by forty-four respondents, sixty-five percent of whom said they wore them to "keep the hair under control."

Chi-square tests were used to test the relationship between each motivation listed by respondents for all categories of hairstyles, hair treatments, head coverings and hair accessories. The only significant relationship was revealed between a desire for manageability and the straightening of hair by chemical means. The quantitative motivational responses are presented in Table 4.

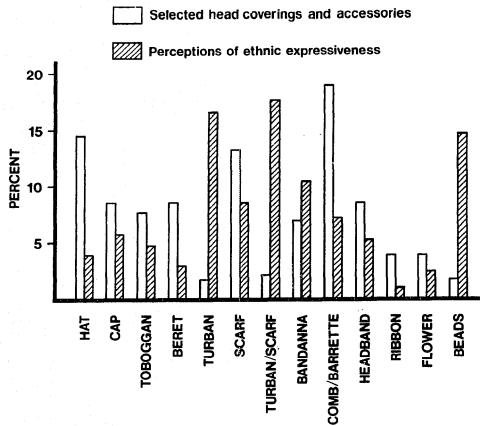


Figure 2. Comparative Distributions of Head Coverings and Hair Accessories Reported by Selected Sample and Perceptions of These Coverings and Accessories as Ethnically Expressive by percentage of Responses

TABLE 4

DISTRIBUTION OF MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS REPORTED BY SELECTED
 SAMPLE IN CHOICES OF HAIR MANAGEMENT AND ADORNMENT METHODS
 BY HAIRSTYLE, HAIR TREATMENT, HEAD COVERING AND HAIR ACCESSORY

Variables	Hairstyle		Hair Treatment		Head Covering		Hair Accessory	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Manageability	36	22.4	57	37.7	47	37.0	69	45.1
Alteration of Appearance	45	28.0	36	23.5	1	0.7	3	2.0
Fashionability	43	26.7	27	17.9	12	7.8	19	12.4
Expression of Personality	36	22.4	23	15.2	4	3.1	10	6.5
Acceptability	4	3.1	3	2.0				
Protection					30	23.6		
Concealment					22	17.3		
Accessorization					24	18.9	36	23.5
Expression of Ethnicity	1	0.6	5	3.3	1	0.7	2	1.3

Hair Management Strategies and Ethnic Affirmation or Denial

No respondent was willing to give an affirmative answer when questioned directly regarding the possibility of a denial of ethnic identity in choices relating to hair management and adornment; however, indirect questioning yielded significant information on individual strategies. Ethnic denial was implicit in the statement of one respondent who remembered:

When I was voted cheerleader at my school, I had my hair braided with lots of braids and beads. This made my hair swirl around and bounce up and down, just like that of the other [Caucasian] girls.

All respondents described their hair in its natural state; sixty-one percent also described their hair as they would like it to be. One respondent expressed mixed feelings:

I would love my hair to be more manageable, but I don't want anyone to think that I am not proud of my hair in its natural state. I don't want anyone to think I feel my hair is "bad" because it is not straight.

In choosing the desired attributes, no respondent described her hair as blonde, nor was this descriptive term selected among desired attributes. The term "hard" was not selected as a desired characteristic. The pattern of these responses is presented in Figure 3.

Respondents were asked if they believed that Afro-Americans showed more concern for hairstyles than other ethnic groups. Seventy percent of respondents answered in the affirmative; however, only five percent of these respondents saw this concern as an expression of ethnic

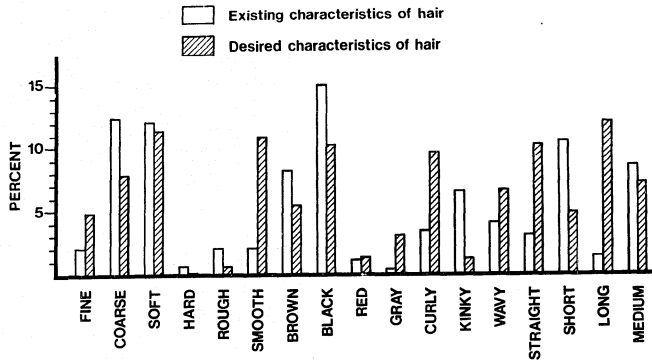


Figure 3. Comparative Distributions of Existing Hair Characteristics and Desired Hair Characteristics Reported by Selected Sample by Percentage of Responses

Respondents were asked if they believed that Afro-Americans showed more concern for hairstyles than other ethnic groups. Seventy percent of respondents answered in the affirmative; however, only five percent of these respondents saw this concern as an expression of ethnic identity. Forty-eight percent of respondents believed that Afro-Americans wore head coverings and accessories more frequently than other ethnic groups. Only two percent of these respondents cited ethnic identity as a factor in this behavior. The impact of ethnic affirmation was felt by one respondent who expressed her attitude toward the Afro hairstyle:

When the Afro came in style, suddenly I was in vogue. I no longer had to spend those agonizing hours under a straightening comb to become what society had labelled as "well groomed."

Generational Patterns in Hair Management

Questions designed to verify the existence of generational patterns in behavior and beliefs were focused on childhood experiences and recollections. Eighty-one respondents recalled discussions with grandparents or parents about hair management. Fifty-three of these respondents remembered the feeling of having to "get the hair under control" by some type of arrangement, treatment, or covering.

Twenty-five respondents mentioned hair as a source of tension in their early lives. Of this number, nineteen, or eighty-nine percent, specified variation in hair texture as a reason for tension in the family group. Twenty-eight respondents recalled negative feelings about their hair during childhood. The reasons for these feelings centered

around hair straightening (52.4 percent), hair texture (26.1 percent), and hair length (25.8 percent). Twenty-five respondents attributed their present attitudes toward hair management and adornment to early childhood experiences.

Fifty-seven respondents were able to relate one or more superstitions which they had heard at some time during childhood from their extended family. Twenty-five, or forty-four percent, of these respondents said that they believed and acted upon these superstitions. Selected examples of superstitions mentioned by several of the respondents followed a pattern throughout the interviews. Many respondents spoke of the ill effects which could be suffered if a bird obtained hair cuttings. Other respondents cited the importance of being very selective in allowing certain persons to comb or arrange the hair. Grandmothers were cited most often as the sources of these superstitions. Additional superstitions related by respondents are found in Appendix C.

Summary

Contemporary data pertaining to management and adornment of hair and head among Afro-American women were collected by the focused interview technique. The collection of the contemporary data was utilized to generate and explore, rather than to prove or disprove, hypotheses. The analysis of the data was both qualitative and quantitative. Categorical and open-ended questions were used to obtain responses from a sample of one hundred women in the Piedmont region of

North Carolina. Demographic data were collected from all respondents.

Findings were obtained on the perceptions of respondents on importance levels accorded hair and headgear. Personal practices in expenditures of time and money involving hair and headgear were analyzed. The selection of hairstyles and headgear was analyzed within the framework of a functional model. The motivations behind these choices were investigated directly and indirectly. An attempt was made to relate certain strategies of hair management and adornment to ethnic affirmation or denial. Some generational patterns were suggested in regard to behavior and beliefs which were attributed to early childhood experiences.

Supplementary data included selected quotations on motivations and examples of prevalent superstitions about hair management. These data are in Appendix C.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Discussion of Comparative Sources

An analysis of the comparative sources which shaped this investigation confirmed the continuing importance of hair management and adornment in Afro-American life. In spite of limitations in the literature and gaps in historical documentation, the research indicated that management of the hair and head persisted as a medium for cultural expression for Afro-American women. The importance of these stylistic expressions was recognized by observers and scholars of African and Afro-American societies. Written and visual documentation verified the elaborate attention given to adornment of the hair and head in pre-colonial Africa, and at least one account established the fact that this African preoccupation was strong enough to survive the trauma of enslavement and transportation to the New World.

Concepts on the dynamics of culture contact and change supported the use of personal adornment among sub-cultures as a vehicle for non-verbal communication of aesthetic perceptions during the process of acculturation. The application of these concepts to a study of stylistic manifestations involving the hair and head among Afro-American women strengthened the framework within which these forms of adornment were investigated.

Historical accounts, from widely separated areas of the New World, testified to the importance of the hair and headgear among African slaves and Afro-American women in both pre-emancipation and post-emancipation settings. Distinctive forms of hair manipulation and head covering were reported and documented, along with observed connections between headdress, status, occupation, and level of servitude.

Similarities between African forms of adornment and New World interpretations of hair manipulation were postulated by some scholars, notably Herskovits, who saw evidence of retentions of African forms. The visual documentation used in this study showed certain likenesses in particular styles; however, these similarities did not necessarily reflect direct continuities from Africa.

The reappearance of the cornrow hairstyle in the United States, following a succession of totally dissimilar arrangements, represented the adaptation of an historic style for the expression of contemporary motivations. The recurrence of this style among New World Afro-Americans can be evaluated in the light of cultural realities in the Afro-American experience. Factors such as reaction to oppression, revitalization of ethnic identity, and aesthetic expression may be considered contributory to stylistic interpretation in the resurrection of this particular style.

The wide diffusion of the headkerchief among Afro-American women was evidence of the functional and symbolic roles accorded this form of head covering in varied cultural settings and circumstances. The communicative aspects of this headgear were reported in historic and contemporary Africa, in New World accounts of slavery and emancipation, and in the data collected from contemporary Afro-American women. The continuing strength of this fabric headgear may have been due to the combined functional and symbolic images it evoked as it communicated level of servitude, marital status, religious status, occupational status, and personality. Both the color and the form of the headkerchief were utilized as categorizing or stratifying mechanisms.

The African cultural tendencies toward the use of the head as a locus for decorative treatment may have been reinforced by exposure to a like emphasis in certain European modes and their diffusion in New World colonial societies. One further possibility suggests the use of the headkerchief in covering, "managing," or "controlling" the hair, one of those physical attributes which set the Africans apart and which formed a somatic basis for enslavement and later, even racism.

While both hair and headgear appeared important for the self-concept, the communicative significance given the hair appeared greater among contemporary Afro-American women. Two recurring themes seemed apparent: (1) the theme of somatic accommodation, and (2) the theme of self-rejection. As a source of aesthetic expression "internal" to the body, the hair was a natural and readily available medium. Perceptions of identity related to skin color and hair texture had

proven behavioral consequences among Afro-American women. The preponderance of advertisements for products designed to alter these physical attributes attested to these perceptions. Some disagreement existed concerning the impact of racism and oppression in the retentive development of this phenomenon. The persistency of attempts at alteration of the hair texture among Afro-American women gave added significance to this behavior in the continuing process of acculturation.

The appearance of the Afro hairstyle came at a time when there was an emphasis among Afro-Americans on projecting those attributes perceived as African. This emphasis coincided with the drive for civil rights and the aspirations for greater political and social equality. It was precisely at this point that the functional and symbolic roles of hair began to coalesce. Hair became an identifying feature for political expression.

The collection and analysis of data from a selected sample of Afro-American women reinforced the prevailing significance accorded hair and headgear in contemporary life. While the investigation was not exhaustive, the findings indicated the presence of conflicting attitudes and behavior. The data revealed conscious and unconscious motivations for this behavior. The affirmation or denial of ethnic identification was not established, nor was the presence of clear generational patterns confirmed. Individual or collective strategies were suggested, but not verified.

The contemporary data revealed the dichotomy existing between behavior and perceptions. Responses indicated a continuing popularity of those methods of treatment which involved the altering of hair texture by either thermal or chemical procedures (Plates XXVII and XXVIII). There were some variations on the chemical treatments (Plate XXIX). There were persistent perceptions of the Afro and cornrow hairstyles as ethnically expressive behavior. Pragmatic concerns, such as manageability and protection, governed decisions about techniques and choices in the management and adornment of the hair and head. Ethnic identity as a motivating factor was given only limited acceptance by respondents.

Some verification of the self-rejection hypothesis was present in the data, especially in childhood feelings. Although there was no proof of the relationship of behavior to ethnic affirmation or denial, the expression of certain aspirations in regard to hair characteristics gave indirect evidence of the presence of latent attitudes towards accommodation to majority physical standards.

The matter of continuities was apparent in the responses involving folklore and superstitions regarding hair management. There was a relationship between beliefs and behavior involving these superstitions, although clear generational patterns could not be established.

Selected literary works testified to the pervasive significance of hair in Afro-American life. Hair was seen as both an identifying and stratifying feature in standards of acceptability. Examples of visual documentation, spanning almost two hundred years, gave indisputable



Plate XXVII



Plate XXVIII



Plate XXIX

evidence of the distinguishing characteristics of hair management and adornment among Afro-American women.

Hair management among Afro-American women was observed and analyzed in various field studies and was seen as an important mechanism for the communication of ethnic and cultural boundaries. The legal significance of hair in the economic and social arenas was documented by recorded cases in which hair management was the source of litigation in job discrimination appeals.

Conclusions

In both historical and contemporary perspective, the management and adornment of the hair and head among Afro-American women represents a unique aesthetic concept. These manifestations of personal style have served as distinguishing behavior in the communication of ethnic identity, and have allowed Afro-American women to preserve symbolic elements of their African heritage. Certain stylistic features of hair manipulation have symbolized the political and social aspirations of Afro-American women. Reactions of the larger society to this symbolism revealed the presence of some prevailing attitudes regarding Afro-American life and culture. Responses to these perceptions by Afro-American women themselves have reflected in turn their attitudes, beliefs, and behavior regarding management of the hair and adornment of the head. While attitudes, beliefs and behavior may vary with individuals, the pervasiveness of the preoccupation with hair management and adornment functions as a significant force in the lifeways of Afro-American women.

The continuing preoccupation with hair and headgear among Afro-American women attested to the presence of these aspects of adornment in Afro-American societies. From the moment of enslavement, ceaseless modifications in the patterns of daily living may have given impetus to the additive process of improvisation in coping with everyday life. The plastic qualities of the hair, combined with the probable latitude allowed in this area, and superimposed on a prevailing African aesthetic, provided the elements for a unique creativity. With improvisation as the touchstone, these patterns of personal adornment encompassed the utilization of African aesthetic forms and New World impressions and materials. In many aspects of dress there was inevitable adoption of majority styles; however, Afro-Americans never totally surrendered to New World norms in matters relating to the management and adornment of the hair and head.

The plastic nature of the hair and the fabric headdress made these aspects of adornment adaptable to both somatic accommodation and stylistic individuality. The hair could be manipulated and altered so as to render it "acceptable" to internal or external aesthetic demands. The head covering could conceal and control the hair and at the same time convey a non-verbal message of identity or status.

As perceptions of aesthetics and acceptability shifted in American and Afro-American societies, the concepts of separatism, such as "Black Power," became popular. Hair and headgear were used to legitimize ethnicity and to symbolize Blackness as an organizing principle. The Afro hairstyle became the symbol for Black identity. The adoption of

the extremely large Afro by some Afro-American women indicated some acceptance of the Western cultural pattern of longer hair for females.

In the early 1970's, modifications in the Afro hairstyle began to signal its demise. The revival of the cornrow style made possible a more stylized and individualized approach to personal adornment. The addition of shells, beads and other items to the cornrow or braided style further enhanced the possibilities for decorative treatment. By the latter part of the decade, the cornrow style began to show variation in styling. From 1977 through 1981, there was a return to the more traditional methods of management, augmented by innovation and diversity in the choices of hairstyles selected by many Afro-American women (Plate XXX).

The lack of written history and the presence of an oral tradition among Afro-Americans may have fostered the preservation of visible communicators of stylistic concepts. Contemporary responses relating to perceptions and behavior tended to support the possibility that ethnic expression of stylistic features is preserved in the psyche, while more pragmatic concerns govern actual behavior relating to stylistic decisions. Thus, a union of function and symbol may be said to exist among contemporary Afro-American women in the management and adornment of the hair and head. In fact, the transitional nature of these interpretations suggests a progressively discernible route from symbol, to function, to style, to choice.

CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

In order to explore the functional and symbolic roles of hair and headgear among Afro-American women, this investigation examined varied sources, including related literature, contemporary data, and visual documentation. The continuing significance of hair and headgear was traced in relevant accounts from widely scattered areas of the New World. The use of the hair and head for aesthetic expression was documented by both written and visual sources. External and internal attitudes and behavior revealed the utilization of hair management and adornment as non-verbal communicators of status, occupation, and cultural aspirations. The continuities in these attitudes and behavioral responses were disclosed in the preservation of selected African forms in the manipulation of the hair and the covering of the head.

Contemporary data, obtained by the focused interview technique, verified prevailing perceptions of stylistic features which involve the head as a locus for personal expression of individuality and ethnic identity. Pragmatic concerns affected behavior in hair management more than did ethnic affirmation or denial. Dialogue with respondents suggested the presence of collective and individual strategies among Afro-American women in hair management, with a high degree of symbolism in the varied arrangements and hair treatments. Self-perceptions were

affected by the realities of the Afro-American experience.

Visual documentation from many sources illustrated the innovative nature of hair management and adornment as distinguishing behavior among Afro-American women in varied cultural settings. A focus on individuality in hair management was evident. A review of the comparative sources suggested the possibility that hair and headgear continue to be selected by Afro-American women for aesthetic and cultural expression and for non-verbal communication of stylistic and personal perceptions.

Recommendations for Further Research

This exploratory study of the roles of hair and headgear among Afro-American women may provide the impetus for further research on aspects of dress and adornment in Afro-American societies. This investigation could form the basis for studies in the following areas:

1. Research on the functional and symbolic roles of hair and headgear among Afro-American men.
2. Comparative studies of hair and headgear in selected areas of the New World.
3. Investigation of the migratory patterns of New World Afro-Americans through the diffusion of manifestations of dress and adornment.

4. Research on the adoption of typically Afro-American stylistic features by the majority society.

5. Analysis of dress and adornment among stratified groupings of Afro-Americans.

It is hoped that this investigation will be a stimulus for researchers to examine the dress and adornment of Afro-Americans in the context of the cultural motivations and implications.

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APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW SCHEDULES

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA SHEET

No. _____

1. Age:

_____ 20 to 30
_____ 31 to 50
_____ 51 or over

2. Population of place of residence:

_____ under 10,000
_____ 10,000 to 50,000
_____ 50,000 to 100,000
_____ 100,000 or over

3. Income:

_____ under \$10,000
_____ \$10,000 to \$29,999
_____ \$30,000 to \$39,999
_____ \$40,000 or over

4. Education:

_____ under 12 years
_____ 12 to 15 years
_____ 16 years or over

5. Marital status:

_____ married
_____ unmarried

No. _____

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. How important to you is your hair and its appearance?
____ extremely important
____ moderately important
____ relatively unimportant
____ not important at all
2. How important to you are the opinions of others regarding your hair?
____ extremely important
____ moderately important
____ relatively unimportant
____ not important at all
3. How important to you are head coverings and/or accessories?
____ extremely important
____ moderately important
____ relatively unimportant
____ not important at all
4. How important to you are the opinions of others regarding your head coverings and/or accessories?
____ extremely important
____ moderately important
____ relatively unimportant
____ not important at all
5. What is your estimate of the total number of hours that you spend on all aspects of personal care during an "average" week?

6. How much of this time is spent on your hair? _____
7. What is your estimate of the total amount of money that you spend on all aspects of personal care during an "average" month? _____
8. What portion of this amount is spent on hair care, including hair products? _____
9. What is your estimate of the total amount of money that you spend on all items of attire during a twelve-month period? _____
10. What portion of this amount is spent on head coverings and/or accessories?

11. How often do you use the services of a professional beautician or hair stylist? _____
12. Do you believe that Afro-American women are more concerned with hair management and adornment than women of other ethnic groups?
_____ YES _____ NO
13. Do you believe that Afro-American women wear head coverings and/or hair accessories more frequently than women of other ethnic groups?
_____ YES _____ NO
14. Which of the following hairstyles or treatments do you use?
- ___ Afro or "natural"
- ___ cornrows
- ___ multi-braids or "Cleopatra" braids

- ___ curly permanent
- ___ thermal straightening or curling
- ___ chemical straightening or "relaxing"
- ___ other _____

15. In your opinion, which, if any, of the hairstyles in question 14 or treatments express ethnic identity among Afro-American women?

16. Can you discuss your reasons for choosing a particular hairstyle or hair treatment? _____

17. Which of the following head coverings and/or hair accessories do you wear?

- | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| ___ hat | ___ scarf tied as turban |
| ___ cap | ___ comb or barrette |
| ___ toboggan | ___ headband |
| ___ beret | ___ flower |
| ___ turban | ___ ribbon |
| ___ scarf | ___ beads |
| ___ kerchief or bandanna | ___ other _____ |

18. In your opinion, which, if any, of the head coverings in question 17 and/or accessories express ethnic identity? _____

19. Can you discuss your reason(s) for choosing a particular head covering and/or hair accessory? _____

20. Which of the following terms would you use to describe your hair in its natural state?

<input type="checkbox"/>	fine	<input type="checkbox"/>	straight
<input type="checkbox"/>	coarse	<input type="checkbox"/>	short
<input type="checkbox"/>	soft	<input type="checkbox"/>	long
<input type="checkbox"/>	hard	<input type="checkbox"/>	medium
<input type="checkbox"/>	rough	<input type="checkbox"/>	brown
<input type="checkbox"/>	curly	<input type="checkbox"/>	black
<input type="checkbox"/>	kinky	<input type="checkbox"/>	red
<input type="checkbox"/>	wavy	<input type="checkbox"/>	blonde
<input type="checkbox"/>	smooth	<input type="checkbox"/>	gray

other _____

21. Would you like for your hair to be different?

YES NO

22. If the answer is YES, use the terms in question 20 to describe your hair as you would like it to be. _____

23. Has your hair ever been a source of tension in your life?

YES NO

24. If the answer is YES, did these tension involve any of the following?

- ___ feelings about self
- ___ feelings about others
- ___ status in the family
- ___ feelings about ethnic or racial identity
- ___ other _____

25. Can you recall your earliest childhood feelings about your hair?

26. Can you describe your earliest recollections about hair management or adornment? _____

27. Do you recall hearing any superstitions about hair?

___ YES

___ NO

28. If the answer is YES, from whom did you hear these superstitions?

29. Can you list any of these superstitions? _____

30. Do you believe, or act upon, any of these superstitions?

___ YES

___ NO

APPENDIX B
TERMINOLOGY

Definitions and Descriptions of Terms Used

For the present study selected terms have been defined. Certain descriptive terms have been augmented by visual documentation.

Coiffure, hairstyle and hairdo--used interchangeably to refer to or to describe any manipulation or arrangement of the hair.

Headdress and headgear--used interchangeably to refer to or to describe any object which decorates, protects or covers the head or hair. In some accounts, headdress may denote a hairstyle.

Headkerchief, kerchief or bandanna--used interchangeably to refer to or to describe a fabric covering for the head. In some accounts, the term handkerchief may denote a head covering (Plate XVIII).

Afro, natural or bush--used interchangeably to refer to or to describe a hairstyle of varying length in which the hair has been left in its natural state; the style generally assumes a spherical silhouette (Plate XV).

Cornrows or braids--used interchangeably to refer to or to describe a hairstyle in which the hair is braided close to the head in various designs; the braids may also extend beyond the head itself (Plate XX).

"Cleopatra" braids--tiny braids extending from the scalp; the braids may have hair added to increase length and volume (Plate XXVI).

Permanent or "relaxer"--process for straightening the hair by chemical means (Plate XXVII).

Curly permanent--process for partial removal of kink or curl from the hair by chemical means (Plate X(VIII)).

Straightening--process for removing the kink or curl from the hair by thermal or chemical means (Plate XXIX).

"Pressing"--straightening of the hair by the use of thermal combs.

"Conking"--straightening of the hair by the use of chemicals; generally used in reference to males.

APPENDIX C
SUPPLEMENTARY DATA

Dialogue Patterns

Informal dialogue with respondents yielded important information which did not appear in the more formalized interview. These comments provided supplementary data which shed additional light on feelings and attitudes toward hair management and adornment. Some repeated responses are combined from various recordings.

Now my hair and I kind of have an understanding. I don't try to do something that it doesn't want to do and it just lets its natural self shine through in return for me.

Being Black it seems that the term "beautiful" means long hair and an image of Whites. True, I wish I could have long hair, but today with all the different styles of hair, long hair doesn't appeal to me as much.

I remember my hair causing me many embarrassing moments when I was a child. On special occasions my friends would get their hair pressed and curled. My hair was very long and very thick. Pressing and curling only lasted a few hours before returning to its natural state.

Well, like almost everyone else I don't like the texture of my hair. My hair is not very straight and I'm always trying to get it straight. The color of my hair happens to be a very dark brown, but when I add a little grease to it, it appears to look black. I do wish that my hair was jet black. Right now I have a Revlon "perm." in my hair and I enjoy it. Well, at least it stays straight.

When I was a little girl and I saw a Black girl with long hair, I would say, "She has pretty hair." My mother would always say, "Pretty hair is clean hair." Now I understand what my mother was trying to say. So, I feel that my hair is pretty also.

The only good thing I can say about my hair is that I can wear it

straight or curly without straightening or having to put a curly permanent in it.

My grandmother would say, "Your hair was very pretty until you put that hot comb in your head."

I used to have a "good" grade of hair until my mother put some kind of medicine in it. She put the medicine in it and it turned the grade.

From the beginnings Black hair was kinky and drawn up. The Afro-Americans tend to be conscious of their Black identity. When the Africans wore Afros, the White man began to wear Afros. Also when Africans wore beads and braids, the White man stole their ideas. The Afro-Americans began to lose their identity.

I think that people that have naturally straight hair are blessed with "good" hair. No matter what kind of hair you have, you should take care of it because your hair is a part of you.

When I first started wearing my Afro, my parents were so angry that they made me go to the beauty shop to have my hair straightened and curled. I cried, and they were sorry.

I always had short hair. Oh, it was not "pickaninny" kind of short. I could wear the conventional three braids. I can remember putting clothespins on each of those braids so that I could have something on my head which would move when I moved my head.

People think if your hair is long, you have "good" hair.

"Good" hair is when you don't have to bother about straightening or "perming" it.

Yes, many people respect or show a greater affinity for people with long hair in the Black race, and it appears to matter to a person if their hair is long or short.

I had very long hair as a child, and cut it off one day just for fun. My grandmother gave me the whipping of my life, saying all the time, "Girl, don't you know what it means for us to have long hair?"

I have always hated my "bad," kinky hair. I wish it were soft and manageable.

Everybody was mad because I had my graduation picture taken in my Afro.

I don't really want my hair to be different, but I wish it would stay straight longer.

Sometimes I wish that my hair had a better texture, and naturally, I would like it to be straighter.

I wish I had hair that I don't have to straighten or put a "perm" in it. I get tired of fixing it, whereas if I had "good" hair, I could get up and just comb it in the morning.

Folklore Patterns

The superstitions relating to hair management followed a pattern throughout the interviews. The same superstitions were repeated by several respondents in all demographic categories. The most frequently recurring superstitions were recorded.

Never throw your hair out of doors. Birds will use it to build nests and cause you to become feverish.

Never say "thank you" when someone does your hair. This will cause a loss of hair.

Old country people will tell not to let someone get hold of your hair; they can work a spell on you.

You don't cut hair or wash hair on a full moon.

If you hang a specific person's hair on the threshold of your house, the person will keep coming back.

If a bird gets your hair and puts it in his nest you will die.

Never let two people work on your hair at the same time.

If a bird gets hold of your hair, you will have a serious headache when he puts it in his nest.

If you cut your hair on a "growing" moon, it will grow; if you cut your hair on a full moon, it won't grow. If you let a pregnant woman cut your hair, it will grow; if a pregnant woman has chest pains, then the baby will have hair.

If two people work on your hair at the same time, the youngest person will die.

If a pregnant woman does your hair, it will grow; if a man combs your hair, it will grow.

Clip the ends of your hair on a full moon.

A pregnant woman should not "mess" in your hair.

If you throw your hair outside and the birds get it, you will become bald.

If you wash your hair with May's first rain, your hair will grow.

If you let a pregnant woman rub her hand in your hair, it will fall out or grow.

If a child is born bald, she or he will have a full head of hair.

A child who is born bald will have straight hair; a little bit of hair at birth is a very good sign.

My hair started from the heartburn my mother had when she was carrying me. That meant that I would have a head full of hair. At birth I really had a head full of hair in curls.

If a bird gets hold of hair that has fallen out, and builds a nest with it, your hair will fall out.

If you cut your hair and a bird comes by and pecks it or gets a piece of it, you will go crazy.

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