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NEGOTIATING BEAUTY IDEALS: PERCEPTIONS OF BEAUTY AMONG BLACK FEMALE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

by

FIANA OLIVIA SWAIN

Under the Direction of Dr. Cassandra White

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the college lives of Black women who attend or recently attended majority white colleges and universities in the United States. Emphasis is placed on how Black women's college experience is influenced by the way they define beauty, as well as how they perceive their White peers to define beauty. Through the collection of ten in-depth interviews, I examine how Black women's perceptions of beauty compare with those of mainstream United States standards and those of the dominant culture of their schools. I explored how the Black women I interviewed responded when confronted with these mainstream beauty standards and how these standards influence their social and academic lives on campus.

INDEX WORDS: Beauty perceptions, Beauty standards, Body image, Skin color, Hair
Black, African-American, Women, Identity, College students

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FIANA OLIVIA SWAIN

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

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2012

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by

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May 2012

DEDICATION

To my family who has always supported me.

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CHAPTER ONE: RESEARCH AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Introduction

In the United States, it is no mystery that beauty plays an important role in the lives of women. In a given evening of television watching, one encounters countless cosmetic advertisements for make-up, hair-enhancing shampoos and conditioners, anti-wrinkle creams, skin-firming lotions, face creams that reduce dark spots and even out the skin tone, sunless tan lotions and sprays, hair dyes, hair relaxers, and other items that are all targeted towards women. Within these advertisements and other images presented to women in fashion and celebrity magazines, movies, and television, the aesthetic ideal is defined and reinforced. To a great extent, this ideal beauty is White, super thin, and blonde with straight hair. This ideal, which is a reflection of White cultural values and a European colonial past, is imposed on women of various cultural and racial backgrounds, and is often consciously or unconsciously recognized as the legitimate standard. While even many White women fall short of these standards of beauty, African-American women are excluded from this depiction of beauty even more so. Although many women may choose to change to lose weight with the help of diet pills, surgery, or starvation, weight loss can be achieved naturally with proper diet and exercise. However, White phenotypic traits are nearly impossible for African American women to achieve. The question then becomes: How do African-Americans respond to these dominant White ideals of beauty?

My initial goal for this research was to explore the specific experience of Black women who attend majority white universities and colleges. Explicitly looking at how their perceptions of beauty as well as their white peers' perception of beauty, affects their experience on campus. However, in addition to collecting information on their experiences on majority white campuses, I also learned a lot about the experience of college-age Black women in general. As a result my

research explores Black women's general concerns and ideas about beauty as well as those specific to them being on a majority White campus.

I was inspired to explore this topic on beauty as a result of my own experience as a Black woman who attended a majority White university in Milledgeville, Georgia. I had never been more racially self-aware than during my first semester at Georgia College and State University. Although college was not my first experience in a majority White setting, it greatly influenced my image of myself and that of my white peers. Immediately I was made aware that I was somehow different. My first weekend on campus, the questions from my White roommate and one of my White suite mates began to pour in. I had become the "go to" person for inquires on all things Black. The initial questions from my freshmen peers were pretty stereotypical, which made me believe that they had very few relationships with other Black people on an intimate level. I remember receiving several hair questions such as "Do you wear weave?", "Can you braid my hair?" and other inquiries about the way I took care of my hair. However, over time I was not bothered by the questioning as long as the person asking was sincere.

I often suspected that my roommate was disappointed that I did not live up to the stereotypes she had of Black women. As a result of this, I felt that she was often grasping at straws to find these preconceived notions in my character. Comments and emphasis were often made about the way I danced, my singing, and even my posterior, as if they were genetically inherited traits common among all Black people. Growing up around other Black people I often heard girls and guys express a desire for a female figure that was curvy with a big butt. However, I never thought my bottom was big, and no one had ever told me otherwise. I felt like her rear-end comments were more of a funny joke than a compliment. After all, she would tell me I had a big bottom, but she never said it was a good thing or flattering. After living with each other for over a

year we had grown pretty close. However, I realized that the stereotypes she had in her head about Black people had not dissolved just by being friends with me. One evening as some friends and I were walking back to the residents halls, my roommate said, “I wish I could be Black for a week so that I can be loud, funny, sing good, and have cool hair.” I was hurt and angered by her comment. What saddened me the most was that she could not see that her comment was offensive. Her description of Black people reminded me of the old minstrel characters who purpose was to sing, dance and joke around for the entertainment of white audiences.

For much of my first two years at GCSU, I felt I had to personally disprove these stereotypes through my behavior and actions. I did not want my differences to be racialized or seen as comical or inappropriate. However, I learned that this was not an easy task, and that some were going to continue to believe what they wanted no matter how I acted. In term of beauty, I found I was self-conscious at times, especially in private settings. In particular, for about a month or so I remember preferring to be that last person to use the bathroom at night so that I could do my hair without anyone watching. I wanted to avoid opportunities for more questions and comments from my roommate and suite mate. Like my roommate’s butt comments, I did not know if their questioning was out of pure curiosity or if they asked because they found my hair odd or unattractive. With my hair being chemically straightened and long in length, I felt this helped me blend in more aesthetically with other girls on campus. Also, I was also thankful I did not need hair extensions to achieve hair length. Otherwise, I would have felt like I was reinforcing another stereotype that I would never be able to live it down. Experiences such as these influenced is what made me want to explore the lives of other Black women in similar settings.

Literature Review and Theory

Historical Context

In order to understand how whiteness pervades United States cultural ideas of beauty and influence the way in which Black women perceive their own beauty, one must understand the historical roots of these ideals. Black women have long been haunted by White beauty standards. However, in order for White or European ideals of beauty to be established as the status qua, whiteness first had to institute its dominance.

European expansion outward began with Portugal in the early 1400s, through the colonization of the Atlantic Islands of Azores and Madeira. In the 1440s the Portuguese traders extended to the west coast of Africa where they apprehended slaves for Lisbon markets. They exploited rivalries among African kingdoms and built outposts along the Gold Coast of West Africa by the 1480s. Here Africans of various tribes and cultures could trade slaves for European goods or the Portuguese could trade slaves for Gold. After failing to enslave the natives, Spain brought African slaves to Hispaniola in 1510 to work the sugar plantations. With a monopoly over the slave trade, Portugal began an immense sugar enterprise in Northeastern Brazil where thousands and thousands of African slaves were shipped throughout the 1500s. Spain and Portugal sent tens of thousands of settlers and servants to colonize the America. The French, Dutch and English followed suit in an attempt to lay their claim to the new land and its vast resources. John Rolfe purchased Virginia's first Blacks in 1619; however Black people's status in the English colonies was still ambiguous. Early records show that Blacks were not automatically associated with the status of slave or servant. However, gradually planters began to associate Black people as slaves and their offspring as slaves. In the 1640s Virginia and Maryland institutionalized slavery. In

1664 Maryland's first slave legislation stated that all Negros and slaves shipped into the province would serve for life, as well as their children (Gillon and Matson 2006).

During European colonialism physiognomy and physiology were used to categorize people into races as well as to determine a person's character or pathology. Features attributed to the so-called Negroid "race", including flat noses, dark skin, and thick lips, were portrayed as less attractive in eighteenth century art literature, and medicine (Gilman 1985). Physiological features were also used to determine if a person was or would be a criminal, sexual deviant, or possess some other pathology. In 1810, Sarah Bartmann, also known as the Hottentot Venus, from South Africa, was taken to Europe to be exhibited around the United Kingdom and France. Hottentot Venus large buttocks were seen as evidence of her excessive sexuality, as well as evidence that Black people were of a different species from Whites (Fusco 1994; Gliman 1985). The image of the Hottentot Venus became an icon of Black women as a whole (Gilman 1985).

Since the beginnings of slavery in the United States, White supremacy ideology justified slavery by maintaining that Black people were innately inferior to Whites (Hill 2002). During the Antebellum era, white Southerners even used Christianity to justify the owning of slaves. Southern Christians proclaimed that through slavery masters could civilize their heathen Blacks by bringing them to salvation. Southern planters believed that the master slave relationship was preordained by God, and that God had placed Blacks under the care of whites to be examples of the Christian faith (Touchstone 1988).

White women, unlike slave women, participated in little to no field labor. Field work was seen as a masculine task, and white women were seen as fragile and womanly for such work. As participants in physically strenuous field labor, African American women were defeminized (Patton 2006). As a consequence of the roles they played in early American society, slave wom-

en were stereotyped as the hyper-sexual Jezebel, the self-reliant and domineering Sapphire, the desexualized Mammy (White 1985).

The Jezebel archetypal figure was unchaste and sexually driven. She had an insatiable desire for white men. This belief caused many enslaved women to be the victims of sexual overtures by white slave owners. White states, "The choice put before many slave women was between miscegenation and the worst experience that slavery had to offer. Not surprisingly, many chose the former…" (White 1985:34). Choosing the former also worked to reinforce this stereotype about Black women. As for the Sapphire, White argues that enslaved women seem so strong and self-reliant because they functioned in cooperative interdependent groups and gain their strength through each other. Since male slaves were more likely to be separated from slave families, slave women had to depend on each other to take care of the children and the family. The Mammy was created after Southern morals were put into question by Northern abolitionists. Southerners had to make slavery look like a learning experience in which whites civilized the unsaved Blacks. Thus the Mammy archetype was born. She, through the influence of white enculturation, was transformed from the Jezebel and became a righteous superwoman who oversaw all the affairs of the house (White 1985). These stereotypes further stripped away Black women feminine identity. She is not seen as womanly or virtuous, but rather she was given masculine and superhuman qualities.

Color was often used by slave owners as a way to divide the labor and create hostility and distrust among the slaves. Light skinned or mixed raced mulattos, whose features more closely resembled white features were given less strenuous work in the master's house, while the darker-skinned slaves with coarse hair were left to tend to the fields (Hunter 2002; Hill 2002; Patton 2006). As result, light-skinned slaves often had better clothes, better access to education, and the

possibility of being granted freedom upon the master's death. Also, fair-skinned runaways would took their chances and attempt for freedom, hoping that their light skin and straighter hair would allow them to pass as free people when confronted by bounty hunters (Patton 2006).

From this point, Blackness began and continues to be juxtaposed to Whiteness, and each is defined by what the other is not. Establishing its superiority over Blackness, Whiteness is therefore associated with that which is civilized, virtuous, and beautiful, while blackness is associated with that which is uncivilized, sinful, and ugly. Physical feature such as skin color, hair texture, eye color, and nose and lip shape become symbols of one's beauty, social status, and distinction (Hill 2002). To a great extent, physical appearance is a more important characteristic for women than it is men in our society. In a context such as this, many Black women are excluded from the definition of beauty, and must negotiate their own beauty identities. This could mean redefining beauty within their own communities, internalizing the normative white standard of beauty, or an integration of the two.

Body Image, Skin, and Hair

Much research has been done on the influences of mainstream beauty standards have on white women. However, little has gone into exploring how African American women are affected mentally, socially or economically by normative White beauty ideals which exclude the phenotypic features of Blacks and their own perceptions of beauty and the body. The literature on body images of African-American women that does exist reveals some conflicting results. Some argue that African-American women are protected from negative body images of themselves by the values of the black community, such as Black men's preferences for larger body sizes (Duke 2000; Jefferson and Stake 2009; Falconer and Neville 2000). On the other hand, other research suggests that they are influenced negatively by mainstream standards (Poran 2006). However,

what is consistent are findings of African-American women having negatives perceptions of dark skin and afro textured hair. Gathering from the variations in the literature, the conclusion is drawn that African-American women are neither completely protected by the values of the Black community from negative effects of white beauty ideals, nor do they completely accept the white standard. The fact that Poran (2006) found evidence that suggests that women were not protected by the Black community from negative body images just reflects the variation in different women's level of internalization of white beauty standards. The level of acceptance by Black women and the negative impact of these ideals are influenced by a number of social factures, such as social class, a history of social, political and economic dominance of white culture, the need to conform in order to fit in to white-dominate environments, and to gain social and economic mobility. African-American women are simultaneously embracing and resisting white beauty standards.

Although several studies have found that African-Americans are more accepting of varying body sizes, this is not the case when questions on skin color and other distinctive African features are presented. Skin color and hair appear to greatly affect how women perceive themselves and others. Surveying African-American women at a historically Black college, Falconer and Neville (2000) found that those who were the most satisfied with their skin color has a more positive perception of their overall appearance than those who were less satisfied with their skin color. Hill (2002) found that men and women judged women's attractiveness based on how light her skin was. Those with the fairest skin were rated the highest in terms of attractiveness, while those who were the darkest were given the lowest ratings. Looking at how they perceive their hair, Rosado (2004) reports that African-American women distinguished between "good" hair and "bad" hair based on its length, texture, and curl pattern. The longer, straighter, and smoother

it was, the closer it was to what they perceived as “good” hair. On the other hand short curly and woolly hair was perceived as “bad” hair. Rosado explains that “good” hair was code for White or straight hair. These examples are not surprising when the historical context is understood. Historical experience has shown African-American women that one gains more privileges, such as freedom and feminine character, the more closely you resemble Whites. While being Black offers the opposite. Therefore, white skin, straight hair, and European facial features and eyes are accepted as beautiful, while black features are less associated with beauty.

This process of African-Americans internalizing the beauty ideals of white culture is what Pierre Bourdieu (1990) calls symbolic violence. Symbolic violence is the unnoticed dominance which is maintained through everyday social habits that Bourdieu calls *habitus*. Symbolic violence is described as a subtle type of violence that emerges from embodied discriminatory beliefs, and is often not recognized as violence. As a result of this misrecognition, symbolic violence is hidden in dominant discourses. Categories of thought and perceptions are imposed on the dominated group. Once the dominated group begins to observe and evaluate the world through the lens of these imposed ways of thinking, they begin to perceive the current social order as legitimate. This then perpetuates and reinforces a social order that privileges the dominant culture without question. The dominated group may not even be conscious of their internalization of these oppressive perceptions, thus symbolic capital—prestige, recognition privilege—is granted to those who embody these culturally shared values (Bourdieu 1990: 127-133).
While some women may be affected by what Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003) calls the lily complex, which is “the belief that the only way to be beautiful is to look as close to ‘White’ as possible” (2003:177), some recognize the dominant cultural ideals being imposed on them, but either resist it or go along with it in order to move up socially and economically in white domi-

nated spaces. Thompson (2009) argues that Black women's hair today still holds political implications, regardless if they mean it to or not. Natural hair is still misunderstood. One cannot assume that Black women who relax and weave their hair do not choose to be natural because they never considered it or because they do not want to, but rather they fear the social repercussions, such as limited employment, little interest from men, and possible their gender being questioned (Thomson 2009). In another study, hair styles that were considered more professional or conservative hairstyles were relaxed hair (chemically straightened), weave, and braids. On the other hand, natural hairstyles such as dreadlocks, Nubian knots, twists were considered unprofessional and even radical (Rosado 2004). Not conforming somewhat to white ideals of beauty can result negative consequences economically and socially. As a result African-American women master phenomenon Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003) call "shifting." They explain that shifting is:

> …a sort of subterfuge that African Americans have long practiced to ensure their survival in our society. Perhaps more than any group of Americans, Black women are relentlessly pushed to serve and satisfy others and made to hide their true selves to placate White colleagues, Black men, and other segments of the community. They shift to accommodate differences in class as well as gender and ethnicity. From one moment to the next, they change their outward behavior, attitudes, or tone, shifting 'White,' then shifting 'Black' again, shifting 'corporate,' shifting 'cool' (2003:6-7).

Here emulating white aesthetic is a way to gain symbolic capital. By choosing to remove the kinkiness from one's hair by chemically straightening it, an African-American woman could potentially better her chances of attaining a better job or procuring a potential spouse. For instance, Hunter (2002) found that African American women with lighter skin finished more years of school, had higher status spouses, and higher incomes. This demonstrates how embodiments of white aesthetic provide access to economic and social privileges. So even if a woman values blackness as beautiful, she still may to conform to white ideals of beauty in order to gain access to the economic and social resources it brings.

Even with these restraints, African-American women still find ways to resist these dominant ideals of beauty while also pleasing white colleges. For example, more studies than not suggest that African-American women are more accepting of larger body sizes, which is attributed to Black men's preferences (Duke 2000; Jefferson and Stake 2009; Falconer and Neville 2000). Also, those women who prefer the natural state of their hair over chemically-processed hair may opt to temporarily straighten it by heat pressing or choose to pull it back in tight buns at the work place or for interviews. However, while outside the work setting Black women may feel freer to wear it in natural hair styles. Then there are some African-American women who choose to intentionally resist white beauty standards altogether. They may do this by wearing extremely large afros, or by wearing African inspired clothing. In sum, while there is great evidence of internalization of mainstream beauty ideals, Black women are neither fully accepting it, nor are they completely resisting it. They are balancing between two different worlds in order to navigate with in white dominated culture and as well as embracing their black identity. Yes, Black culture exists within the American culture, but it is far from being a standard which is fully accepted in American society. Often, certain aspects of blackness are discouraged, such as afro hair styles that are perceived as radical or unfeminine. Black women understand how their skin, hair, or bodies may be perceived by others, and they attempt to adjust according to the situation. Du Bois best describes it in his article "Double-Consciousness and the Veil." Du Bois writes:

> After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, The Teton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, the sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity (Du Bois 168).

When Du Bois speaks of this double-consciousness or two selves that African-Americans have, he is articulating the struggle of being both Black and American. Du Bois describes the moment he realized he was black and said "…it dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others; or like, mayhap in heart and life longing, but shut from their world by a vast veil" (Du Bois 168). Even though Blacks see the United States as their home and share some of the same values and customs as white Americans, they are still seen as "the other". This inability of whites to see commonality, to look past race and accept blacks as Americans, is the veil of which Du Bois speaks. As a result African-Americans have to live in two worlds, that of a black identity and one that embraces Western white American culture. However, instead of surrendering totally to either self, Du Bois suggests that African-American engage in the struggle in order to achieve racial progress. By embracing both selves one can better understand herself and the culture of the society in which he lives. By doing this one hopes to be able to remove the veil which causes the double-self.

Whiteness and Colorblindness

Studies on Whites as a racialized group reveal that "whiteness" contributes to the continuation of inequality not only because "whiteness" is normalized in society and whites have become both accustomed and blind to their privilege, (Edwards 2008; Lewis 2004; Simpson 2008) but the "color-blind ideology also stifles any progress. The prominent "color blind" racial ideology among whites denies the recognition of race. Even in the context of a society which is still pledged with inequality, color-blindness suggests that racial inequality has been eliminated. This frees whites from any blame of current inequalities and which then places it on the victim (Bonilla-Silva 2004; Lewis 2004). Also, "because the dominant racial ideology pretends to be color

blind, there is little space for socially sanctioned speech for race-related matters (Bonilla-Silva 2004)."

After examining the University of Colorado's superficial attempts to "build a welcoming and diverse community" Simpson argues that meaningful dialogue about racial issues is hindered by the color blind stance held by white student and faculty. Also, in order for meaningful dialogue to be possible an alternative to the color blind thought must be adopted which would require Whites "learn to see, accept, and experience their lives as raced and to explore the possibility that some of the good, ease, or rewards they have experienced have not been solely the result of hard work and just effort but of a system of biased in their favor." (Simpson 2008).

Today, many Whites claim that race is no longer important and that everyone should be color-blind. To even talk about race or racial groups is seen as racist because it perpetuates racial categories (Bonilla-Silva 2004; Lewis 2004). However, Lewis (2004) argues that in a racialized society, all actors are racialized, even whites. Since all are racialized to a certain extent they must perform or "do race." However, because of Whites' social dominance they are able to racialize others without necessarily developing their own racial consciousness. A person can claim not to identify as white, but that does not mean he or she no longer attains privilege from being part of the dominant racial group. Therefore, an individual does not have to consciously identity one's self as white to benefit from a system in which to be labeled as a racial "other" carries physical, psychological and material penalties (Lewis 2004).

McIntosh describes how Whites are taught to believe that their life experiences are what are normal or ideal:

> I was taught to see myself as an individual whose moral state depended on her individual moral will. … Whites are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative, and average, and also ideal, so that when we work to benefit others, this is seen as work that will allow ''them'' to be more like ''us'' (McIntosh 1988 in Simpson 2008: 4).

The color-blind ideology allows the idea that whiteness or white ways of being, knowing, and experiencing are what is normative and ideal to perpetuate. This devalues and delegitimized the lived experiences of minorities, and leaves little room for alternative perspectives. As a result this limits the space in which one will experience racial encounter with otherness (Simpson 2008).

If White values and experiences are the normative ideal and those of this privileged group expect everyone else to follow suit with the same beliefs and ways of being, then other racial groups who cannot or choose not to live up to these ideals are excluded and penalized. However, it is not recognized that the devalued lived experiences of minorities is the result of white privilege in society; it is explained away as a result of their laziness and lack of hard work. With this being the case, it is likely that African American women who choose to attend majority white campuses are expected to internalize same values and behaviors of the dominate group. If they fail to live up to these standards, then they may find themselves struggling to be integrated into the college society.

Definition of Black Consciousness

Among Black people, the state of Black Consciousness is being aware of the meaning of one's blackness in the context of whiteness (Cone 1970). Those who are Black-conscious "know that their color must be the defining characteristic of their movement in the world because it is the controlling symbol of white limitations placed on black existence (Cone 1970: 50)." Black consciousness is the knowledge that one's blackness is the reason for her or his oppression. Black consciousness is also Black people's willingness to fight back against the source of their oppression, and the resistance against white definitions of blackness (Cone 1970). An expression of black consciousness that many are familiar with in the United States is Black Power. Van

Horne (2007) describes Black power as the preservation of cultural integrity and pride and self-acceptance in being black. It is a striving for autonomous will, and the rejection of Black "subjugation, subordination, servitude, and subservience of Black people to White people" or any other group of people. Autonomous will, which fosters self-respect, positive self-esteem and dignity, is deemed as the pathway to freedom and equality in both the individual and group context. The objective of Black power is to consolidate the strength of black people (2007:5-7).

Although the height of the Black Power movement in the United States took place during the late 1960s and 1970s, this does not limit Black consciousness to this period. Black people have been resisting and organizing against White oppression well before the Black power movement and still do today.

Methods

Methodology

During the course of my research, I interviewed fifteen African American women attending colleges and universities in the United States. Over the summer, I had casual conversations with a couple of women about my research topic, which resulted in my first interview once I actually began the recruitment process. Recruitment was done by a form of snowball sampling and with the use of social media, with the aid of an informational flyer to protect anonymity. The first two women to express their interest in participating in my research were also willing to suggest other potential candidates, which resulting in other interviews from their friends. My existing connections with my undergraduate alma mater also aided me during my recruitment process. I also obtained interviews through the help of friends and relatives.

Interaction with participants consisted of semi-formal interviews, lasting about one to three hours each. All interviews were done individually except for one. One informant I set an

interview up with brought a friend with her, and they did the interview together. Interviewing took place over the course of the 2011/ 2012 academic school year. Interviews were held in public places such as coffee shops, restaurants, as well as in the homes of the informants or myself. Most of my interviews took place in the Atlanta area and Milledgeville, Georgia. One interview was done in a location between Atlanta and Milledgeville. Although all the interviews were done in Georgia, not all women attend a university in Georgia. Universities represented include: Georgia College and State University, Savannah College of Art and Design, Emory University, University of Alabama, Auburn University, University of Michigan, and University of Georgia. With permission from my informants, I used a digital audio recorder to document all my interviews. The names of all participants were changed and replaced with pseudonyms. Only Dr. Cassandra White, the principal investigator, and I, the student principal investigator, have access to information on participants. All data I collected from participants was stored on a passcode-protected, secure file on my computer. Only I know the passcode.

After interviews were conducted I went back and listened to the recordings. I transcribed and took notes on the interviews. After going through the first few recordings I began to identify key themes and kept those in mind as I went through the rest of the interviews. Themes relating to the hair, skin, body image, and cultural identity were my main focus.

Research Limitations

In the interest of keeping my research to a manageable size, I limited my sample size to ten people. This is a decent sample for non-quantitative research of a localized area (O'Reilly 2005), but would not necessarily be seen as an adequate projection of Black women's notions of beauty on a nation level. However, the in-depth interviews provide a rich date on the local level. While quantitative questioning is more concern with attaining a large enough sample size to

claims having a representation of a whole populations, qualitative interview is more are “an opportunity to delve and explore precisely those subjective meanings that positivists seek to strip away in their search for standardization (O’Reilly 2005: 114).”

Another limitation is that my research is solely based on interviews. Given that fact that I have not been granted permission to conduct research on the various campuses, I am unable to witness firsthand the day to day experiences of the women in my research. Participant observations would have potential brought out perspectives that my informant may not have thought to share in interviews.

Also, the limited available literature on topic such as the prevalence of disordered eating, depression, and anxiety among African-American women as a result of negative self-images is a limiting factor in my research. Little has been said how African-Americans emotionally and psychological cope when they fall short of White standards of beauty.

Practical Applications and Future Research

My ethnographic research on Black women attending majority White universities may have practical applications for universities and colleges throughout the United States. By contributing to our understanding of the effects of mainstream beauty standards on minority college women, as well as our understanding of minorities' ability to cope and fit in socially and academically in the college setting when confronted with such standards, universities and colleges can better meet the needs of Black students and other racial groups. In addition, this research will make a contribution to the anthropological literature on the body, the self, racial identity, and racism, not just as an overt act of discrimination, but as a structural and institutional system in the United State which contributes to white privilege and in which whiteness has been normalized as the standard.

In the future I hope to build upon my current research by conducting more interviews and by diversifying my methodological approach. Potentially, I would like to broaden the demographic of my informants by incorporating men. Through casual conversation with some young college men, I realized that men are key definers and interpreters of beauty as well.

CHAPTER TWO: IDENTITY AND BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS

Throughout the analysis of my finding I refer to the women in my research as Black, meaning that they are of African descent or heritage. Since not all Black women are American, I refrained from using African-American as a criterion to participate in the research study. Racial, ethnic, and nationality are all social constructed ideologies, rather than biological. However, as a society we give these terms culturally symbolic meanings. The idea of race in sixteenth century American history was ambiguous. In the English language race was interchangeable with words such as type, kind, breed or species. Not until the end of the seventh century did the term race begin to refer to populations of people interacting in North America. Part of this shift in the meaning of race, and the need to categorize people by physical differences came about as a result of leaders' of the North American colonies decision to make African people permanent slaves. Racial categories were needed to decide where one fit into society (Smedley and Smedley 2005). Black consciousness in a nutshell is a sense of pride in being Black, the recognition of oppression of Black people, the rejection of white definitions of Blackness, and the willingness of Black people to fight back against their oppression. Initially, I was not concerned with the idea of Black consciousness and did not focus my questions in a manner to gauge levels of Black consciousness among participants. However, the way in which the women identified themselves racially, and their perceptions of Blackness and Black women, made me wonder if Black consciousness or lack of influenced their views on beauty. Since I did not design questions specifically to gauge Black consciousness I cannot definitively label participants as Black conscious or not. However, I did find some correlations among those who had a pride in Black culture and being Black and those who rejected mainstream beauty ideals. For the purpose of this paper I

will focus on identifying a sense of acceptance and pride in one's Blackness as well as their rejections of White definitions of Black women.

The first question that was asked of all interviewees was how they self-identify racially, ethnically, and nationally. From this question I received a variety of different responses. Some were confident in their answer while others were hesitant in their response. At times the question provoked long retorts about how they define themselves. How these women responded to questions of identity, what it meant to them to be a Black woman, as well as what they associate with blackness, led me to consider how Black consciousness or lack thereof affected their perception of beauty.

For Rachel, a sophomore at the University of Alabama and Baylor, a law student at Emory and a University of Georgia alumnus, the answer to the question of their racial, ethnic, and national identity was flatly African-American. However, for the others, there was no simple responses.

Naomi, a graduate student at the University of Michigan, and Nina, a senior at Georgia College and State University, had no problem with identifying themselves as Black; however both had a few twists to how they self-identified. Naomi said: "So racially I identity as a Black woman, ethnically as an African-American, and nationally...my nationality um I would of course say I'm an American, but I don't really like to identify as an American." Nina response was "I'm from Louisiana and my family is black. However, we have Blackfoot Indian in us and Creole, some French in us. So I consider myself a black person. To be politically correct I would basically say African-American, but I prefer just to be called Black."

Lily identified herself as Nigerian-American. She was born in the United States but her parents were born in Nigeria. She ends her commenting after informing me she is Nigerian-

American, but I was interested if she identified as Black as well so I asked again how she identified racially. She was a little puzzled at first until I gave examples such as White, Asian, or Black. After giving the examples she understood and said she was Black, but it's a different type of Black. What she meant by a different type of Black was that with her parents being from Nigerian, they brought her up with different cultural values.

With confidence in her response, Carrie said, "I consider myself as either Black or African-American and I'm of Caribbean descent." However, shortly after, when I asked her what it meant to her to be a Black women, she said she did not like to be defined by her race. Likewise, Alexis, who attended Savannah College of Art and Design for 4 years, responded to the question with, "I would say I'm black, like yeah I'm Black." Later in the interview she informed me that she sees herself as Black, but she did not define herself as Black. With a somewhat similar response Tori, a senior from Georgia College and State University, replied:

> I'm black, but I really try never to self-identify because I just feel as though there is no purpose. So on standardized tests I'm the one who put… I just leave it blank and just put like a smiley face because there's no point. I'm black. It doesn't … my intelligence level doesn't depend on my race.

My cousin Rose responded with:

> I'm American. I don't like… Personally I don't like saying I'm African- American. um Because I don't know… I'm not from African, although my ancestors came from Africa, I have ancestors who also came from Europe. I don't like to say I'm African American. I'm American. That is my nationality. My ethnicity, you can just say I'm black. I mean… I mean… yeah black… I would go by black you know.

Rose started off confident in her response; however, when she got to the part about her ethnicity she was hesitant to say she was Black. Also, she was quick to take on an American identity, but not an "African" one. Part of this hesitation could be due to that fact that Rose and I have a grandmother that we are all close to who is half Black and half Irish. My grandmother is not shy about reminding us about her Irish background and Rose's father is not shy about mentioning

how my grandmother's mother slept with a white man. Also, we have another great-grandmother who uses to leave with Rose's family at one point before her death who was Black and Choctaw. As a result, I think these constant images and verbal reminders of a multi-racial background might make her hesitant to say Black although the rest of the world sees you as Black.

Out of all the ladies I spoke with, Mio's attempt to separate herself from a racial identity was most pronounced.

> Racially, I'm Black. Nationality, I'm American. How I identify myself though, I would say… I don't necessarily define myself by my race I just define myself by who I am. So I would say, if someone ask me who I was I would say you know I'm Mio. That's me. I wouldn't say so much I define myself that I'm black. It more that… I'm just me by myself really

From some of the responses one might initially come to conclusion that there is little sense of Black consciousness among some of these Black women. Especially those who said they do not want to be defined by their race. However, from talking with them further I learned there were two different meanings to this statement of not wanting to be defined by race. For Carrie and Tori, this meant not wanting race to be a determinant of one's intelligence or character. They did not want negative preconceived notions about Black to define who they are. Neither Carrie nor Tori lack a pride in being Black. For when I asked Carrie what she associated with a Black women or Blackness she said, "Strength, survivor, independence, beautiful, kind of a do it all super women." When I asked Tori what it meant to her to be a Black women she said "I think strength and able to endure." She also said "I think faith. Faith in myself and faith in God" As for Blackness, she associated, "Longevity and love." She also thought of "the constant struggle to overcome anything."

While not wanting to be define by their race for Carrie and Tori meant not wanting race to be a determining factor of their intelligence and character, for Alexis and Mio the statement

meant much more. Mio and Alexis did their interviews together. At times they were so liked minded I wondered if it was just because they were friends or if doing their interviews together was a bad idea. However, they asked to perform the interview together, and neither seemed uncomfortable answering my questions. In fact they were both very passionate with their responses. At the beginning of the interview Mio states:

> Okay, I would say that's really difficult for me I guess just because I've never really defined myself by my race so. I really couldn't like say like… I don't well…I can tell you what I do believe for the definition. I don't think all black women are the same. I think that there's a lot of like aspects to black women that are being ignored because everybody is trying to fit into a norm. like um you know… I think women in general are all the same. So I can't really say that Black women specifically are like this. I Just think that things that aren't personified are like creativity, or like um … I feel like when people think of black women it always the southern like idealized version of them. I don't think that fits all black women at all. I couldn't really directly answer you but that's what I think.

Mio starts off by saying that she does not identity as a Black and but decided tell me what she thinks about Black women. She talks about the stereotypes that pledge Black women states that this is not at all a representation of all Black women. However, as the interview progresses there are a lot of harsh judgments made about Black women and Black culture as a whole.

> I think there is a small portion that is trying to like lift up the Black woman, be like look she's so awesome. But I feel like Black society kind of almost wants to obliterate that because they want to personify only a small part of Black women which is like the stereotype. Like you're loud, obese, and you're not that well educated, and you can't speak well, and like things like that. That's only a certain group of people, majority in the south. Not everyone does that.

Here Mio places blame on Black society for perpetuating negative stereotypes about Black women. Also there is this idea that only a few people want to lift of the Black women while the rest of Black society wants to perpetuate these negative stereotypes about them. Later Mio touches on the media again. She felt like Black culture has bought into this idea that it is cool to be stupid. Both Mio and Alexis felt that the stereotypes portrayed of Black people in the media

are what Black culture takes on as the norm. They felt like they and a select and a very small few of Black people where on an island by themselves. They also feel like they are shunned because they are shunned by Black culture because they do not embody these stereotypes. Both also greatly criticized Black people for their chose of fashion. Throughout the whole interview there was never point where they said anything good or positive about Black culture. A lot of the interview involved them venting about how black people reinforce negative stereotypes about Black people such as being loud, obese, unintelligent, young parent, and thugs, and how this made it hard for the select few who were not like that. Also, there was long discussion about their distaste for Black fashion. They on about went about how ridiculous Black fashion is, and how Black women do not know how to dress themselves flatteringly. There was a huge disconnect between themselves and Black culture, and neither saw a place for themselves in it. There was no sense of pride in being Black or in Black culture.

Although little pride in Black culture is found among Mio and Alexis, examples of Black pride among rest of the women interviewed could be detected. While talking about what it meant to be a Black woman, Rachel said:

> I feel it has something to do with strength. I feel like the African-American as women we are very strong. And just throughout history and the role models we've had like in the past. Like the singers and the people who made it through… like Harriet Tubman, she's a strong African American woman. So I just think of Strength. If you're going to be an African-American woman you have to be strong.

Baylor describes black women as "strong, independent, those are just some words that I guess would correlate and relate. Strong, independent, um kind of successful, powerful. Kind of run the world girls, type thing I guess. Basically like the leader in the community, the leader in the household, that sort of thing." On a similar note as the previous two women Nina

> when I think Black women I think, I want to think power because I think about the struggles that Black women go through, the plight of the Black women, but at the same token I

> don't think it's a hindrance to us in any way. I feel like it's been something to make us stronger as Black women.

Naomi stated to "I would say in my experience to be a Black woman means to be someone that has a lot of strength and a lot of power and knows how to use it." Rose was not quite sure what I meant when I asked what it meant to be a Black woman, however she did this:

> It means a woman who's Black [laughs]. I'm proud of who I am. um I'm proud of um to know that I'm a part of something. I feel like there are a lot of successful Black women you know that I look up to and admire like Dr. Maya Angelou, Coretta Scott King. So I'm proud to say that I am a Black woman.

While discussing what she associates with Blackness Lily says,

> when I'm trying to define Blackness I actually think about my parents. So that's why I think strength and pride come immediately out of that. um Just when I think of the experience they had to go through to get where they are now um. I know it's cliché to say they had to fight against adversity of some kind, but it's true. They came here in the 70s and 60s and um they try to go to school, do undergrad and get their pharmacy degrees to practice and there all these random, random things in the way when their trying to their licensing exam. Just weirdness that white people don't have to go through. So that's why I think of strength um strength, pride, and motivation.

Many of the women in the interview associated strength and power with Black women and Black people in general. This was starkly different from Mio and Alexis' impression of Black women and culture which was greatly negative.

As far as recognizing the oppression against Black people, all the women mentions that mainstream society perceives them negatively. The women felt that Black women are perceived as loud, aggressive, always ready to fight, mad, sexual objects, obese, comical, unintelligent and inferior. Only Mio and Alexis saw Black people as the main cause or perpetuators of these negative stereotypes. All the women rejected these ideas for themselves; however Alexis and Mio felt that most Black people bought into or embodied these stereotypes. The rest of the women did not express the same sentiments.

In present times, most Black people are not verbally or overtly fighting against oppression on a day to day basis. However, a statement that Nina made about redefining the "Black woman stigma," reveals that Black women are still battling against oppression, just in quieter and less overt ways. Nina states:

> I do not like to reinforce the stereotypes of a black woman nor the mad Black women, the Black woman who is always loud and who always picks a fight on a dime. I like to reinvent that Black women stigma because if anybody knows me they know that Nina doesn't fight, she doesn't argue, she doesn't cuss, drink, smoke. Any confrontation I avoid it.

What is even more interesting is that later on in the interview Nina notes that she had gotten over that cultural shock of being immersed in an all-White intuition at a young an age. Her home school group was all white and her church was all White. Now she felt that if anyone has been prejudice against her she was oblivious to it. However, she is not quite as oblivious to it as she thinks, at least not on a subconscious level. This reminds me of Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003) remarks that Black women become so use to shifting back and forth to appease both White and Black society that they do not even realize they are doing it anymore. Likewise, I think it has become natural to feel the need to combat these negative stereotypes about Black women, but with time it is no longer seen as a struggle. So the struggle is not gone, but rather the anxiety of the struggle has dulled, and the regular action taken against the oppression has become naturalized.

Probably more consciously than Nina, Lily expresses the need to actively disaffirm her white peers' negative preconceptions. She talks about being more aware of the way she speaks and dresses so that peers do not think the worse of her. She says that she does not embody any of the negative stereotypes perceived of Black women, but she feel that small accepts of her character may give her white peers the impression that she does. As a result she feels the need to con-

stantly check her behavior. In the following chapter I will touch on ways these Black women reject mainstream beauty norms and later how this affects their perception of themselves. In addition I look at what role Black consciousness, if any, plays a role on their perception of beauty and their self- esteem.

CHAPTER THREE: BEAUTY IS FROM WITHIN

When I asked the women interviewed how they defined beauty, most of them gave non-physical descriptions as their first response. However, a few opinions about proper attire were given as definitions of beauty. Beauty was often given intangible characteristics. Often beauty was said to come from within or that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Beauty was described as a personality trait, or an expression of self. However, on two occasions beauty was described as the act of taking care of one's appearance by making sure that person was neat, clean, and properly dressed. These intangible descriptions of beauty, I argue, are a form of rejection of mainstream beauty norms that are often not easily achievable by Black women.

Rachel responds with this statement after I asked her how she defines beauty:

> Well, beauty is in the eye of the beholder, but [big emphasis on the word but] um, I guess someone …oh this sound stereo-, well not stereotypical, cliché, but like personality. You can have someone who's really not that attractive in the face or something, but like their personality can overshadow all of that. And that's what I think. And what really makes you beautiful. Inner personality I guess, inner self.

Similarly, Baylor states that she is a firm believer that beauty is in the eye of the beholder; however, for her, she finds intelligence beauty. She felt that beauty may include a few physical characteristic, but mostly personality and intelligence. She felt that a person could be aesthetically attractive on the outside, but their personality could wipe all that a way. As a result, she does not see physical characteristic as beauty. Rose echoes the same idea when he stated:

> Beauty is within. You can have a person that's attractive, a person that's pretty, but beauty comes from within. It's something that comes from the inside and that shines in to the outside. That comes outs, that's brought out to light. Not everyone can be beautiful. You can have an attractive person a pretty person. Beauty is just something totally different. Beauty is the whole package. It's what's within the person.

Rose is vague about what this beauty from within is, but it is clear that it is not a physical trait. Rather it is something intangible, perhaps a certain personality.

Naomi laughs as she makes her initial statement, but gives a similar response as Rose, Baylor, and Rachael.

> This is going to sound kind of cliché, [laughs] but beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Um it's… it is the way that you dress, the way you express yourself. It's whatever is within your eyesight; whatever is within your view. For me beauty is my inward nature, right. It's the way that I'm able to put things on my body or um express myself that makes me happy, right. To another person it may be the fact that they have big hips, or small hips, or big lips, or a small nose or those physical features. But for me it is more so an inward thing, because beauty [physical beauty] can fade.

Naomi does not just talk about an inner personality when she describes beauty, but beauty is also the ability to choose how one will express one's inward feelings or "nature" on the outer body. This ability choose how one will express their inner self is perceived to make a person happy. While the women above were able to give definitions of what they saw as beauty, Carrie could not. She said she did not have a definition for beauty because what she may fine beautiful some-one else may not fine beautiful. However, she did say beauty is whatever you make it, whatever appeals to you, or whatever puts a smile on your face.

Lily's idea of beauty starts off kind of abstract. She states, "I think beauty is being pleasing to the eye, um beauty isn't harsh, beauty isn't aggressive, beauty is just kind of like… I feel like beauty is sort of easy, like it is or it isn't." She also said confidence can be a beauty thing if it is not taken to the extreme and if a person "has it together." However, Lily found physical beauty hard to define. She said she did not have an equation of for beauty, but you know when you see it because it just is. Her last statement leads me to interpret that once again beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

Tori seemed to see beauty in almost every aspect of life. She explained that she is in a point in her life that she is redefining everything. She states "I think I define beauty as just waking up realizing that God loves me enough to wake me up today. So no matter what I look like

God is loving me this much to wake me up." Tori also described beauty as change and the ability to grow from it. She also sees beauty in the small thing like her boyfriend snoring, when a baby smiles, pregnant women, or standing in the shower listening to gospel music. She described the wrinkles in her great aunt's face and the nostalgia within those wrinkles as beautiful. She explained that sometimes we need to slow down enough to see the beauty.

Nina probably best articulated the dominant feeling about what beauty is among the women interviewed. She states:

> I define beauty as… it's intangible. There's two ...You know there's inward beauty and there's outward beauty. And I define inward beauty as having so much more worth than outward beauty. Because yes outward beauty is what you see first, but they have a lot of very ugly beautiful people in the world. So when I think of someone as beautiful and when I say someone is beautiful, I'm talking about their attitude, their demeanor, their character. Then outward beauty comes later. Like That's something that I see second. If that makes sense. Or I try my best to. You don't want to judge someone on the outside and say oh she's a beautiful person when she may not be. He or she. So just depends. Definitely I try to keep inward beauty on top when thinking about what beauty is. It's a persona; it's an air you have about yourself. It often is confidence. Confidence is a beautiful thing. Insecurity is seen as less beautiful. Someone who is their own person and they know what they believe regardless of what other people may think. Someone who's kind and gentle…which there are people who are introverts and extroverts. Just because you're gentle doesn't necessarily mean you're reserved and an introvert. You can be a kind and gentle extrovert. It depends on the person. But overall inward beauty trumps all. And I do feel like it is in the eye of the beholder. A lot of times what I may think as beautiful someone else may not think is beautiful. So it just depends who is looking at the beauty.

Nina's almost poetic response sums up the overall consensuses of this group of women. For most beauty is described as something that is intangible, a persona or character that one has. This sort of definition of beauty makes beauty potentially open to all people. While a physical definition is often more limiting, such as that which is displayed in mainstream media. One can choose to be kind, gentle, or even confident, but one cannot so easily change one's skin color, or nose without the money and surgery to do so.

Mio and Alexis were the only ones who gave physical descriptions of beauty. Mio states:

> I think people are pretty um when they're symmetrical [laughs]. Like that's how I define beauty. It's like when you have a style that works best for your face type or your body type, then I think you're pretty. Usually People who are happier I tend to find pretty and things like that. That's what I'm attracted to or would think is pretty. If you're dress well and look well for your body type and your face type. It has really nothing to do with culture for me. It's more so, do you take care of yourself pretty much.

Although Mio talks about physical aspects of the body she does not make a judgment about what type of body, skin or hair is beauty or attractive. However, she did feel that that proper care and covering of the body was important.

Like Mio, Alexis also found people who are happy to be beautiful. She said that your mood affects your outward appearance and no wants to be around someone who is always grumpy. Also, Like Mio she finds that people who take care of their image as beautiful. By taking care of your image she meant keeping a clean body, taking care of one's skin, taking care of one's hair and properly dressing the body.

After reading all the responses to how these women define beauty, one might think these are just politically correct responses that anyone being recorded in an interview might make. However, when I asked these same ladies to give me physical feature they felt made a person attractive some had a hard time doing so. For some of the women it was like pulling teeth, which made me feel kind of bad for asking them questions.

Two of the young ladies gave physical features that many would considered more of a facial expression than a physical attribute of beauty. When I asked Nina what physical features she felt made a person attractive she said she loved smiles and eyes. She also said she loved facial expressions. She felt that just like a person could have a monotone voice, a person can be monotone with their facial expresses. She likes people who express their feelings with their facial expressions.

Carrie also said she finds smiles attractive. She is unattached to those who do not smile. However, before she answered the question she asked if the answer had to be strictly physical. I told her yes, but after she answered the question I asked her how she would have answered if the question was not limited just to the physical. Carrie said, “I look for someone with a big heart. When I see someone who is all about giving, will put other before themselves, even when it’s like, why are you doing that. I kind of define that as beauty as well.”

Rose insists that there is not one physical feature that makes a person attractive. She felt that you have to meet the person before you know because everyone had a feature that makes then attractive. For one person it might be their eyes while for another it may be their nose. Baylor easily gave a physical description for what she found attractive in men, but for women she felt that all women are beautiful in their own right. She states:

Honestly I feel like everyone carries their look differently so regardless of what it is. I guess I don’t really have a standard of what I think is beauty for women. I think everyone carries something differently, everyone’s body is different, and it works for them, and it’s beauty for them, you know what I’m saying. So I can’t really pinpoint what I would say is beautiful.

Similar to Rose’s response, Baylor felt that every woman had something about them that made them physically attractive.

Tori is extremely personal and loves to talk. As a result, I was distracted by her bubbly personality and did not press her to specifically touch on what she thought makes a woman attractive in addition to her comments on men’s attractiveness. She starts off by telling me how she uses to have a “type”. However, she said God throws that whole type thing out of the window. Her ideal guys should have been tall, dark, lean, but athletic. However, God sent her a guy who was short lighter in complexions, and husky. She did not specifically mention women, but she did say that when people stop focusing so much on what they think they find physically attractive, that is when they fall in love with a person.

Lily had a hard time describing physical features that she thought made a person attractive. Finally, she told me she would just give me features that would easily be perceived as beautiful by others. She said to be adored or perceived as beautiful by others one must be skinny, but not too skinny, have a thin nose, and full lips. She said she felt horrible for giving a physical description for beauty. It was not clears what her own preference was, but it was obvious there anxiety about equating a few physical features to beauty.

Naomi, Rachel, Alexis, and Mio gave descriptions of attractiveness that included body shape, hair texture, and facial features with relatively no uneasiness. Rachel said, "I'd probably say like clear skin and lots of hair. Like thick, curly just lots of it. I love hair. Um. Or it could be like straight hair, just lots of it." Shortly after Rachel kind of reneges on her previous statement by saying that as long as a person does not look crazy they are okay. It was obvious she was quite fond of thick hair, but her comment that followed leaves her definition of attractiveness open to other possibility. Therefore attractiveness or perceiving oneself as attractive is more achievable.

Alexi stated that she was "in love with facial spacing. Facial spacing is my thing." My interview with Alexis and Mio was the first time I had ever heard the term. However, facial spacing is actually what the name implies: spacing of facial features. Facial spacing as Alexis explained deals with the size, spacing, and symmetry of your eyes, nose, mouth, forehead, and chin in relation to the size of your face. She mentioned that she envied those with nice facial spacing. However, throughout the interview she never gives a preference for a certain shape or size noses or lips over another. She just likes balance and symmetry to the face.

Mio told me "I think what's attractive is if you have a feature that I'm jealous of or always wanted" one of these features is long hair. Growing up she was into reading Japanese car-

toons/comics, such as manga and anime. She told me that all the characters have really long hair and she wanted to do her hair like the characters she watched. Also she said she was obsessed with perfect curls. It did not matter if they were looser curls or afro-curls, just as long as they made perfect ringlets. In addition Mio finds people who are exotic to be attractive. By exotic she means not the norm or people she is not used to seeing. She said she has been around Black people and White people all her life so when she see someone who is Asian or African she finds herself attracted to that person.

Naomi states:

> I guess for a woman I would think what would be attractive would more so be um her curviness. I think growing up you always… for me I was always this skinny stick figure [laughs]. And I always wanted more curves because everyone around me had curves. I was like dang I don't have anything. So um one thing they would always say was in school, I was taking those noassatall pills. And so what that meant was…Is it okay if I say this…What it meant was I had no ass at all [laughter]. So for me that always stuck. I was like man I must not be black, I must not be a curvaceous person, I must not be beautiful.

Naomi experience and definition of attractiveness is one that is more common in the Black community than mainstream. However, her refection on her childhood experience brings to light that even non-mainstream beauty standards can have negative effects on women if they are valued within the community. This also reveals that Black women in predominantly white intuitions may feel pressure to find a balance between satisfying white beauty norms as well as Black beauty standards.

Overall, many of the descriptions of attractiveness given by the women left the definition open. Depictions of attractiveness, such as people who smile, allows anyone who is capable of smiling (which is the majority of people in the world) to be considered attractive. Rose and Baylor's belief that every woman has something about them that makes them attractive again leave the definition of attractiveness open to everyone. I would even argue that Lily's uneasiness about

naming specific features to define what make a person attractive is a result of her not wanting to exclude herself or others.

These alternative ideas about beauty which include all women is contrary to the ideal that there is universal standard of beauty, which is exclusive. Wolf (1991) problematizes this idea that there is an ideal or physical standard of beauty in Western society, in which women much exclusively must strive to live up to. She argues that the idea that there is an objective and universal standard of beauty that women must want to embody, and that men must want in a woman, is a myth. Wolf claims that the beauty myth is a tool to perpetuate patriarchy. She states:

> ’beauty’ is a currency system like the gold standard. Like the economy, it is determined by politics and in the modern age in the West it is the last, best belief system that keeps male dominance intact. In assigning value to women in a vertical hierarchy according to a culturally imposed physical standard, it is an expression of power relations in which women must unnaturally compete for resources that men have appropriated for themselves (1991:12).

Wolf also explains that women’s strive to physically embody the values of beauty myth weakens women physically, mentally and professionally, as well as pits women against each other. Older women are threaten by younger women and they all fear aging (Wolf 1991). However redefining beauty could potentially change this.

In addition, those women who valued Black culture or had pride in being Black tended to be those who were less likely to define beauty using physical characteristic. However, even those who exhibited little black consciousness, who use physical markers, did not make judgments about preferred body types, hair textures, and skin color. Rather, they expressed how they felt others should present their body, hair, or skin. When asked to look at what physical features they felt made a person attractive, hot topics such as body image, hair, and skin were still greatly avoided by those women who valued and had pride in Black culture. Smiles and other facial expressions were described as attractive. Also, comments were made that all women have some

aspect or feature that makes them attractive. These kinds of definitions of attractiveness allow all women to define themselves as such. Although Rachel is able to name more common definitions of attractiveness, by mentioning hair, she attempts to correct or appease her statement. She was quick to say at the end of her comment on the question that and one who did not look crazy is attractive. Naomi comment varies from the others, but her standard of attractiveness was not based on mainstream norms. Within the Black community, men and women have their own standards of beauty that vary from the mainstream ideas. There is an appreciation for women curvy or “thick” women. In the following chapter on body image, some of the women reference these ideas. This may mean that Black women attending majority white university still whole on to some of these ideas in when they are not the norm on campus.

CHAPTER FOUR: BODY IMAGE, SKIN, AND HAIR

About half way through each interview I directed my questions specifically participants feelings and experiences with their physical appearance. The focus was on their body image, their skin, and their hair. Many of the participants' responses reveal that Black women are conforming or balancing multiple beauty standards. Although there are main stream body norms common in the United States, Black women also spoke of beauty standards that are valued in the Black community. However, the values associated with hair and skin come from a value-system derived from European colonialism and slavery, that are perpetuated and internalized even today within the Black community. One participant even mentioned that she associated more with Asian beauty ideals. Baylor, a student at Emory University, describes Black students experience on campus as one where you must teeter this line between what is acceptable among your white peers, and what you culturally hold of value. She says some totally reject the idea of conforming to the beauty ideas of their white peers, while others are completely caught up in it.

Tight Abs or Curvy Hips

My discussion on body image revealed various ideas about the body. These Black women are neither fully accepted mainstream beauty ideals, nor did they fully reject them. Among the women interviewed some have accepted more mainstream ideas about how the body should look while other draw on definition of beauty found in the Black community and other ethnic groups. Others have formed a combination of the two, or formulate their own ideas. Regardless of their ideal body image, none of them seem to be totally dissatisfied with their body, expect for perhaps one.

Carrie and Rose's comments on their body reflect more mainstream body ideas. Carrie says that she has always struggled with body image. She always thought she had to have a flat

stomach and tight abs. However, she says it's not as bad as it used to be. Also, she feels like it has nothing to do with the people on campus, but rather it is an internal obstacle she as to work on. She says it does affect how she views herself. She mentions that her roommate is tone and has a flat stomach and she wishes that she had a flat stomach too, but Carrie says she has to accept how she is now before she can make any changes. Overall though, Carrie feels like she has a nice body shape. She feels like she has nice shapely toned legs. Carrie does not think her body meets society standards, but she says she is pleased with her overall appearance.

Rose is insecure about her body and weight. She does not like her curvy body. She works hard to maintain a particular weight. Rose wishes she were thinner; however, she says that some may consider her thin already. She says guys actually like her curves. Since she is aware that others appreciate the way her body looks, I asked her where does the disconnect come from then. Rose says:

> I guess that disconnect came from my father. He would always tell us that we were fat. You know. Or don't eat that. So we would grow up saying your hips are too big. Or he called my mother fat. He calls my sisters fat. You know. So that… because he was the first and only man in our lives for so long, that really affects… cancels out any man that tells you your body is beautiful. Because if your father doesn't accept your body it's hard to listen to another man saying that he does.

Neither Carrie nor Rose believes that their body ideas are influenced by mains stream beauty ideas or the students on their campus. However, both reflect American society's obsessions with being thin and supper toned. Rachel just sees her negative view of her body as inner issues. While Rose's view of her body has greatly been influence by her father, they still reflect view of mainstream society. Just because one grows up in a black home does not necessarily mean that the means of that family hold the same view as other Black people. As Black people more up socio-economically they are more so exposed majority white institutions and values.

Lily has a love/hate relationship with her butt. She tries to make it look less pronounced by not wearing tight fitting jeans. However, if she sticks to her workout schedule she feels pretty great about her body as a whole. She feels she is toned in all the right places. She likes what she has and feels she just needs to optimize it by keeping up with her workout schedule. Lily says she will never be the six foot four Amazonian woman you find in Victoria Secret runway show, but she believes she has been blessed with a lot and needs to take care of it.

Baylor and Rachel hold body image ideas that are favored more in the Black community. When talking about body image, Baylor shares that, "It's somewhat important I think to me. It definitely isn't my, it definitely is not the end all and be all for me. And like I told you obviously I'm a slender build, so for me if I put on a few pounds here or there I'm good. That's perfect. It's like what you want almost." Although she would not mind putting on a few pounds, Baylor is not unhappy with her body image. She feels like it works for her and she is happy with the way she is. Baylor says her friends view her as pretty thin as well. Sometimes she looks in the mirror and thinks her thighs have gotten a little bigger, but when she goes to see her friends they tell her "no Baylor, you still look like a stick figure." Regardless, she has embraced her body and kind of laughs it off.

Similar to Baylor, some days Rachel she wishes she had hips or butt, but after a while she says you just have to work with what you have. If she gains weight she feels like she could easily change that butt, she cannot change the fact she does not have hips so she just accepts it. After going to college she realized that body image did not matter as much, people of different shapes and sizes were going attention from the opposite sex. Although Rachel may feel like she does not fit one standard of beauty she has begun to accept alternatives. Likewise, Baylor keeps with

her pervious statement in the previous chapter, that all women have something about them that makes them attractive; everyone has a look that works for them.

Tori's body image ideals reflect both mainstream and popular Black ideals. She believes that her body image is okay. She says there are certain outfits that she puts on that make her feel great. However, she feels like there are a few things she could work on. Tori has gained some weight since college and wants to get back down to her original weight. However, she loves her breasts that seem to have come out of nowhere this past year and she loves her butt.
Tori mentions that when she has gone to the gym she as gotten some comments for those who work there that her shorts are inappropriate. However, she says that her short were to her knees and that there were other girls with shorter shorts on. She feels that because she has a curvier body that she is perceived by her peers as inappropriate.

Nina's view of the current view of the body can neither be described as one being more common in mainstream society nor in the Black community. When I asked Nina how her body image affected her self-esteem she says, however, she does express some past insecurities that may have been influenced by mainstream beauty ideas. "My thing is health. Health, health, health." She feels that if you have a healthy body you are good to go. Although she points out her own imperfections at times, she feels that she has been in an amazing state with her body and working on health. She goes to the gym all the time and works there as well. At first she did want exercise because she works at the gym, but now she is trying to work on being healthy. She hopes to run the 10k Peachtree Road Race in Atlanta in July. Since she has been working out, people have told her that she has slimmed down, but she says it has not gotten to her head. Nina says her regular workout routine is not about being skinny, rather it is about being healthy. Nina says she has always had "thighs and a booty." This makes it makes it hard to buy clothes.

Therefore that is an aspect of her body that she has not always been able to appreciate, but she is thankful for what God had given her. At this point in her life she loves her body, and there no one else she would rather switch with.

Similar to Nina, Naomi feels like her body image affects her positively because she did not feel like she had to conform to the standard of thinness held on her campus. As long as she is healthy she feels good about her body. She believes her peers probably think she needs to work out and go to the gym more. They probably feel she needs to be thinner. However at the same time she feels they are trying to figure out why she does not look like the girls in the Black music videos. She thinks that her peers expect her to have a big butt, or be more curvaceous just because she's Black.

Like the previous two, Alexis favors a body that is health. Alexis does not dislike anything about her body and she would never get plastic surgery to change anything on her body. She does feel like she could be healthier. She says that she receives comment from guys asking if she used to play sports (which she did). She likes that her body reflects that she has an active lifestyle because she wants to attract active people into her life.

Mio used to get annoyed with her body type because all her life people have harped on the fact that she is thin. She is naturally skinny, and she says it is hard to explain that to people who live in a society that is overweight. She says it took her years to realize that people where picking on her because they were jealous. However, the negative feelings about her weight and short stature have subsided. Now she loves the way her body looks. She says others think she is sickly or make backhanded comments.

> I don't, in at least American society, think that I'm viewed as the optimum of beauty because everyone want to be like thick or voluptuous or have big things but, in Asian society I'm like the perfect size. I'm like exactly what everyone wants to be. So they perceive me as really pretty. Which is why I tend to venture more in that direction. Because over

> there they will be like ‘dang, how did you get so skinny?’ but they will mean it in a good way.

I found Mio’s comment about American society interesting. Here she says that American society views women who are thick or voluptuous as ideal. However, at the beginning of the interview when I asked her what she thought the dominate beauty standard in the United States was she said women have to be extremely thin; a size zero. Due to the fact that negative comments about her weight are coming from both Black and White people, I think a combination of not fitting the typical Black ideal of beauty, and the negative comments coming from girls who wished they were thinner, influenced her comment here. Mio feels she is being rejected by those in the black community because she is not voluptuous, and she feels she is hated by those who hold main-stream body idea but cannot a achieve it. As a result she finds comfort in the Asian community. However, this not to say she only associates with Asian people or culture.

Overall, there is no one way in which these Black women respond to mainstream body norms. Some are taking from both White and Black ideals while also creating their own ideas about body image. Mio’s situation reveals that everything is not a Black and White dichotomy. Black women can be influenced or find commonality in another culture such as Asian or Latin cultures.

I Love My Skin

When I asked the women in my research how they felt about their skin, everyone said they loved their skin. A few said they had to learn to love their skin, all where at a positive point in their life when it came to their skin. Although all felt positively about their skin, some reveal that it still influences their experience on their majority White campuses and the way they were perceived by their White peers.

Carrie says she loves her skin. Her skin is the one thing she has never had a problem with, minus a pimple here or there. The only time she gets upset about her skins is when she gets a pimple because she is so used to having clear skin, and only needing to do the bare minimum to keep it looking clear. She is thankful that she has never had to spend money on expensive acne cleansers. Since she did not touch on it, I asked Carrie about her skin color. She describes it as a brown somewhere in the middle, not light but not dark. She is thankful that she has never gotten negative looks that she says that some darker skinned girls get.

Lily feel like her skin and body image is pretty much stable in terms of how it affects her self-esteem. She feels like she has uneven skin tone so she wears make-up, but as far as her skin color she loves it. She says:

> my skin tone in general makes me feel pretty fantastic because it's so pretty. Brown is really my favorite color and I'm not just saying that because I'm Black. See [she show me her brown purse] um brown is just my favorite color. I like the way it looks. Like in the sun like think… personally I think I look fantastic in the sun. I love my skin color.

Later she mentioned that her family uses skin lighteners, which she said is common in Nigeria. Some family members attempted to put some on her when she was younger but the chemical in the cream burned her skin. Her reasoning for bringing up this up is was although she loves her skin color, culturally it is easy to see that lighter skin tones are prefer over darker skin tones.

Baylor loves her skin and is happy in it. As far as skin tones go in the Black community she feels like there is not a standard. The "light is right" idea may have ruled years ago, but Baylor believes that most Black people have come to a collective agreement that it is silly to believe light skin is better than dark skin. She feels that we should not degrade ourselves because we already have people doing that for us. Baylor states that Black men and Black women have come to accept that Black people come in different shades and they are all beautiful in their own right.

Baylor comments, though optimistic, are contrary to resent studies on colorisms in within the Black community. Esmail and Sullivan (2006) conducted a study where they interviewed 50 African-American men and 50 African American women at a Midwestern University. They found that 74 percent of men found light complexion women most attractive, 22 percent found medium-complexion women attractive, and only 4 percent of men found dark-complexion women attractive. Among women, 64 percent found light-complexion men most attractive, 6 percent found medium-complexion men attractive, and 30 percent found dark-complexion men attractive. Esmail and Sullivan's results reveal that there is still a color preference for lighter skin tones. However, the research also reveals that lighter skin tones are more preferred in women than they are in men. This preference for lighter skin derives from colonialism and slavery and has been internalized even within that Black community. This is largely due to the fact the air skin and white features were associated with freedom and privilege (Esmail and Sullivan 2006). What is also important to mention is that Baylor is lighter in complexion. For her to say that colorism in the Black community does not exist is like a white person saying that racism does not exist because her or she does not see or experience it for themselves. Due to the fact that Baylor is lighter in color she would not necessarily have experience as a dark skinned Black woman who complexion is less favored within the Black community. Her perception may be based on that fact that she experience less negative reactions to her skin tone among other black people.

As far as skin in general, when Baylor is looking to date someone she looks for a person with clear skin. She believes that skin is the window. Baylor has had clear skin her whole life, but her third year at UGA she broke out badly, and this condition was not going away. She says she literally felt ugly. There is this awkward feeling when you are talking to people. You are wondering if they are looking at the imperfection on your face. She also mentions that employ-

ers take notice to things like that. Employers are looking for people who are physically attractive. Baylor explains that there are studies that show that people who are more physically attractive are more successful. So skin to Baylor is important to her, but she is not one to go out and buy a lot of cosmetic products or feel like she needs to where makeup.

Naomi feels that it really does not matter what shade of brown she is, just that fact that she is Black means she has to work harder than her other peers. She cannot just meet her White peers or professors' expectations; she feels she has to go over and beyond them. Her self-esteem goes down a little when she walks into a classroom, because all eyes are on her. She knows that they are looking at her not because they know her to be a great and intelligent person, but rather they stare at her because of the color of her skin. They know nothing else about her except that she is Black.

Alexis does not think her skin ever affected her. She feels like she was born this way and there is nothing she can do to change her skin color so she does not let it bother her. She dislikes when people say they wish they were lighter. She says there was probably a point when she was younger when she may have wanted lighter skin, but now she likes her skin tone. She just wishes she had clearer skin.

Among Naomi's friends of color, who are not Black, she feels empowered and beautiful, because as a group they all know how it feels to be different. Among her white peers it depends on who she is talking to. She says that some people will not talk to you if you do not meet their standard of beauty. She believes that her peers think her skin is beautiful but she thinks it is hard for them to admit it.

Rose loves her skin and describes it as beautiful. She says "if you were to mix ever single color together you would get my color. So I love my caramel complexions." However, she says

she had to learn to love it. Growing up she and her brother were the darkest out of all their siblings and even their cousins. Rose feels like it is harder for Black women in the Black community than in American society as a whole. She feels like women have to have lighter skin to be considered attractive. Darker skin is not seen as attractive. Rose's impression is similar to Hill's (2002) findings. Both men and women judged women's attractiveness based on how light her skin was. Those with the fairest skin were rated the highest in terms of attractiveness, while those who were the darkest were given the lowest ratings.

When she was younger Rachel used to want to be lighter skinned, but now she is comfortable and she loves her skin tone. Even though she knows that people will judge her based on her skin color she has just accepted that is how the world is. She would not change her skin color for the world. She especially likes her skin when she does not have any breakouts.

Tori believe she has great skin. Her skin is clear and she loves the color of her skin. She describes her skin as light brown or "red bone." She feels like her skin color represents generations of adversity. As far as her white peers she believes, "They will view my skin as being a microphone for the Black race. Like, 'uh oh she's Black let's get her opinion on what Black people are like.'" She says it gets old after a while, but she does answer people's questions. She does not think that every Black person has the same perspective as her, but she will still answer.

Mio likes her caramel skin and feels as though others who have that color skin tone look exotic. She says, "it's something that's mine therefore I like it type thing." Mio use to be annoyed that no one could tell what her ethnicity or race was but now she finds it as a complement that someone may associate her with being Hispanic or Ethiopian. She states:

> I do like that I look exotic because I think because of the kind of stuff I like to do it allows me to integrate into different cultures without it being a problem. Everybody always asks me what am I, so it doesn't no matter who I associate with, it's like it doesn't really matter because you didn't know what I was away like. I can more easily become

> friends with people outside of my race. And I like that because they don't fine it weird. That's what I like. Until I tell them, you know I'm Black then they start having preconceptions about me and how I should act. If I don't tell them it's like I just integrate wherever I want to go. That's how I am naturally. I'm very adventurous. I like that about myself. I think it really sets me about from other people. It makes me really pretty.

Mio's comments about her skin reveal that lighter skin among Black women can provide them racial ambiguity. Mio fines that when people of other cultural backgrounds are unsure of her racially identity they are do not have preconceptions about her because they do not know how to define her racially. She feels like it gives her the ability to maneuver in and out of different cultural setting without seeming "weird" as she says. Mio ends he comment by saying that for her, it is less about your skin tone and more about how clear your skin is.

All the women love their skin and some have grown to love their skin. The fact some say they had to learn to love their skin testifies to this still present favoring for lighter skinned Black women in the Black community. While Black women in general much deal with these discriminatory standards held among their Black friends and peers, many realize that their white peers may judge them or have preconceived notion about them based on their skin. Sometime their skin is used to define their attractiveness, while other times people judge their character by it. The idea that white skin or lighter skin is more attractive or beautiful was rejected by all the when, regardless of their circumstance on campus.

There's Power in Our Hair

Out of all the topics discussed during our interview, the women interviewed where most passionate about hair. Whether they have had bad or good experiences with their hair, there was much to say. Their hair often affected their self-esteem more than anything. Sometime hair even affected their experience on campus. Also, like skin color, some ideas about hair stream form colonialism and slavery.

Baylor has natural hair that falls passed her shoulders, but she keeps it pressed. Natural hair in the Black community refers to afro-textured hair that has not been chemically straightened with relaxers. Pressing the hair with heat allows Baylor to where her hair straight without the use of chemicals. She has had some shorter haircuts but feels that she could never go the route her sorority sister took when she went natural. Rather than transition from relaxed hair to natural hair for a long period of time in order to keep length, her sorority sister cut off all her straighten hair at once and was left with a little afro. She feels that everyone has their own look and that is just not her look. Her hair is everything to her, and she states:

> my hair to me is part of what makes me that cute pretty girl." She says "for me even if I go out the house and I don't have makeup on, I'm kind of dressed kind of you know rough looking. As long as my hair is done I'm still cute! That's what I get, that's the feeling I get. So for me it like if nothing else is working for me that day, my hair got to be working. Like it's that important to me [laughs].

Baylor explains that for a lot of Black women hair is everything. Black women will spend hours at a salon on a Saturday morning just to get the perfect look, or they will spend hundreds of dollars on extensions for the perfect look. She was reminded of a television show called "The Game," with Tia Mowry. Tia's character who had long hair had just broken up with her boyfriend. In an attempt to make a drastic change that would be symbolic of a new beginning she cuts off all her hair. Baylor says "for us there's like power in our hair." She continues and on by saying for Tia's character it was a release and a new beginning. In the Black community hair defines us.

Baylor believes that her peers would say that she had nice long hair. She often gets comment for Black and White people asking her if that is her real hair.

For Rose, she is quite particular and extremely insecure about her hair. She always has to have it done and it has to be straight. She says her hair will grow, but then it will fall out. She

wishes it would grow faster and was easier to maintain. Rose's hair is the number one thing that affects her self-image.

Tori says, "Hair can affect my self-esteem because I have thick, coarse, like I don't have the pretty type of hair, like at all. I have like the field slave type of hair, um like seriously you need to put some Crisco in my hair is so dry half the time." Tori's statement is similar to this idea in the black community that there is of "good" hair and "bad" hair. Good hair often refers to straight, loosely curly, and long hair. Bad hair is coarse, kinky, short hair (Rosado 2004). These ideas stream back to slavery. Those who were had more privileges on the plantation were the lighter skinned slaves who often had longer and more straighter or less kinky hair. Many worked in the house and because they would be in the presents of their masters and other guest they were given time to do their hair (Bellinger 2007; Hunter 2002; Hill 2002; Patton 2006). These privileged slaves were also more likely to escape from slavery because they more closely resembled whites. To have skin and hair that looked more white meant freedom and privilege (Bellinger 2007; Patton 2006).

Tori says she has found some great products for natural hair that she likes. She really likes the smell of the products she uses. She says that if her hair smells good than she feels good. She feel like her natural friends think her hair is cute while her non-natural friends are wondering what she is going to do about her hair. She thinks others see her hair as okay, while she sees it as the worst hair. Tori wishes that her hair were longer. She feels if her hair were longer she would feel cute every day.

For Rachel: "If my hair is not done I feel like crap. Like [laughs] I feel the lowest of the low [laughs]. Like, it's a big thing to me. I mean it doesn't really matter how it's done. But the fact that it's done." Her hair plays a major role on her self-esteem. She says that she likes her

hair, but she wears a sew-in most of the time while she is at school. So she really does not get to see her own hair much. She is at a point where she wants to grow her hair out so she wears the sew-ins so that she does not even have to touch her real hair. At the beginning of her freshman year she wore this bohemian weave that looked kind of like Afro-textured hair. Everyone was raving about her hair. Several people were stopping her to tell her how beautiful her hair was. She became known as the "girl with the hair". Rachel comments that she says she felt like a liar. She did not really like the hair because it was so much hair, but she tolerated because she like the attention. However, she felt bad because she knew that people would eventually find out the truth.

Carrie states:

> The only time my hair, I guess, defines me is when I need a perm [laughs] and I'm having one of those oh my gosh put this up, what's going on?, you know. Mom, come do my hair. That's actually when I feel like…If you need a perm you know that you got two textures going on right now and it's not looking alright, it's not okay.

Carrie never thought about how she would describe her hair, but she says she likes her hair. She feels "like hair is hair." She says that other would describe her hair as being "good hair" because it is long. People assume because she is Black she is supposed to have short hair. People are often shocked when she tells them she has never worn a weave. However Carrie feels that "good hair" is healthy hair regardless of the texture or whether it is relaxed or natural. I asked Carrie if she ever thought of going natural and she says that she would have the patience for it. She feels like having a relaxer is lower maintenance.

For Mio her hair makes her confident. What she hates about the subject on hair is when people assume you are trying to emulate another race just because you want it a certain way. Mio loves straight hair. For one, Mio had a difficult time doing her hair when she was natural. She feels that her natural texture is in between. Hair is not kinky, but really curly. She complains that

her natural hair texture will not stay pressed, especially in Savannah where the humidity is really bad. When she wore her hair curly and did not bother to press it, her hair would matt up while she was asleep. She finds relaxing her hair a better option for her. When her hair is relaxed she is not using as much heat on her hairs as she was when she was trying to press it straight. She also feels that her relaxed hair is less work and the style lasts longer. She also feels that her hair is retaining more length. She really like long hair and feels it frames her face. With her curly hair she says it was never long.

This idea expressed by Carrie and Mio that natural hair is not easily manageable is another common statement among Black women. They choose to relax their hair because they feel it is easier to manage. However, I would argue that natural hair is only hard to manage if your main goal is to keep your hair straight. If one is open alternative hair styles or looks, natural hair is just as easy to manage as any other type of hair.

Alexis says that your hair does not define you, but she grew up thinking that it did. She used to be extremely proud that she was a Black girl who had hair that fell down her back. She got her first relaxer when she was twelve. When she got her first trim, she realized she was not taking care of her hair because her hair went from being a few inches shy from her bottom, to her mid back. She was devastated. She does not say what cause the damage to her hair, but she does say later that she wanted to go natural so that her hair would be healthier. Alexis feels at this point in her life she is fine as long as her hair style goes well with her face. Now she is natural, but she says she still misses her relaxed hair because she could throw it in a ponytail and walk out the door. Alexis says she did not transition to her natural hair necessarily for the look of it, but rather for healthier hair. She grew to love the look of her natural hair, but she is more in love with the fact that is healthy. She feels like she is prettier with her natural hair because she feels

like she does not have to do as much work to it. Even when she was relaxed she still had to flatiron her hair every day because of its coarser nature. Her perception of her prettiness used to be determined by the way her hair looked that day. Now with her hair relaxed she feels more comfortable with herself. She got a relaxer when she was younger because you got tired of being burned with the hot comb. Also being an active person, she knew pressing would not last long. Back then she did not know that her other option was to wear her hair in its natural state. "You see everyone else with their straight hair and you think that is your only option."

Rachel feels like there is no such thing as good hair. However, when she was younger she thought good hair was long hair that is easy to manage. She uses to wish that her hair was flowing like White girls' hair. That is why she got a relaxer in the first place.

Lily declares:

> I think my hair can make or break me. um So in terms of my self-esteem I could look incredibly great, I could feel and look incredibly great because for me they're kind of weave together. If you look good you feel good. It's an expression and I think it's kind of true. Um so if I feel like my hair look great then I'll feel great and I'll have super high self-esteem. But in another moment if my hair looks bad then I will feel like garbage. Like to the point where I might even feel a little bit sick even though nothing is really wrong with me.

Lily also talks about feeling nervous when she meets people when her hair is in that period of the cycle where she feels like she needs to get it done. People from all over the country come into the labs where she works. She feels like her hair affects the way people perceive her. She cannot wear her hair too textured because she feels like it will be perceived by her peers as unprofessional.

During high school, Lily had relaxed hair but she did not wear weave. She wore her hair in a bob and she thought her female classmates where silly for wearing weave in their hair. However, when she got college she says she had to reassess what was appropriate for her in her new

environment. For a short period she cut off her hair and wore it natural, but she got embarrassed because it was really short and she felt it did not fit her. This is when she started wearing weaves. She feels that people or her white peers feel more comfortable when you closely resemble a look that they are comfortable with. Lily also feels that her hair is high maintenance. She says it takes a lot to for it to look good. She also wears the weave because she says she just wants to go with easy, and for her weave is easy.

Naomi loves her hair. She states:

> My hair, I feel empowered on campus, just because it isn't seen very often and I think it's, I don't know, I think it is going against the grain. Not too many people can wear it in that way being that I am on a predominately white campus. It's almost like it's an educational learning experience for most of the people I'm around and for my friends that have never been around too many Black people who wear their hair like that because it's natural.

Naomi describes her hair as very curly and coiled, "like a slinky when it's not been um…when it's not going down the stairs. You know how it expands when it goes… it's not like that [laughs] it's more so like a slinky without movement." She describes her hair as thick and coarse, but very versatile. The versatility is what she believes makes it beautiful.

She thinks that for the most part her peers like her hair. She feels like those who do not like her hair are just jealous because they cannot do the same style with their own hair. A lot of her White peers will ask her to braid their which she thinks is kind of cool. However, she has to explain to them that their hair may not turn out the same way, or it may not turn out at all.

Naomi receives a lot of comments from her White peers about her hair. Either they think it really cool and want to touch it or they try to sneak in backhanded comments. Naomi states, "Sometimes they're like 'man you did all that yourself? I know like that has to be tough. It has to be rough dealing with your hair. You have to comb it? Can you put your hand through it? I heard

you can't put your hand through it. Yeah, that's tough.'" These kinds of comments irk Naomi because they are making it out to be this terrible experience or burden that she has to live with.

When I asked Naomi if she ever felt like she had to conform to a particular beauty standard to fit in with her whit peers she says:

> Oh my god, yes! That is a great question. It really is! Because when you go in for an interview, and that's with your white peers, okay and with your white professors or whoever is interviewing you, I feel like I need to straighten my hair. Because if I don't they're going to be, 'oh she's militant [laughs]. Don't mess with her. We have to be all smiles today. You know don't feel comfortable because I feel like they don't feel comfortable. Because they don't know what to do with it.

Baylor expresses a similar experience her sorority sister had when she decided to go natural. Her sorority sister cut off all her hair and had a little afro. When it grew some she started getting a lot of crazy comments and responses from her white peers. Baylor says that the other students thought she was militant Black Powerist before even getting to know her. White students would come up to her and throw up the Black Power fist. Baylor explains that some of the responses were pretty crazy.

Nina expresses her decision to go natural and the positive affect it had on her self-esteem. She tells me:

> I have natural hair. One of the reasons I first started going natural was because I had people in my life telling me that I couldn't and that I wouldn't look good with it, and I would look like I came out of National Geographic Magazine, you know that kind of thing. So for one it was a challenge that I was up for. I was like okay if it's really that hard let me prove that to myself and I can overcome it. As I did it I started gaining more and more of a love for natural hair. Because originally I was that person who three weeks I was like oh unhuh I need a touch up this is not cute, you know. But it became something bigger than that. It became an appreciation for the way God made me and the way my hair grows from my scalp. So I think going natural, though initially it may have dropped my self-esteem at first, because I was like my hair, I'm sweating my hair out and it just doesn't look good, it boosted up higher than it's ever been. Like I feel more attractive now outwardly than I ever did when I had a relaxer. So, love that.

Nina's experience with going natural is similar to White's (2005) argument. White argues that some Black women who choose to go natural are making a rhetorical statement that resists Euro-centric beauty standard, while also developing self-definition and liberation. Nina redefined how she saw herself and the type of hair she thought was beautiful. Nina, Says she only received positive reinforcements from her peers, even those who originally her she would not look good. They have come back to tell her that going natural was the best decision she has ever made. She appreciates there compliments she says:

> But I do know that there are some people who feel like it looks good on me but it wouldn't look good on them or it looks good on me but it wouldn't look good on others. So most people look at me and say you are a natural who knows how to wear her natural hair. Which I have mixed feeling on that. On the one hand I say thank you I appreciate that. On the other hand I think about what they mean when they say knows how to wear it or who it looks good on. Because if relaxers were not invented no one would have that opinion on natural hair. It's only because they've seen straight hair that they feel that way.

This idea that natural hair is only cute on some girls is not an uncommon comment. Also, natural hair is often categorized as a style rather than a hair texture.

For many Black women hair greatly defines how they perceive their self-image. The idea that afro-textured hair is bad or unmanaged still exists in the minds of some Black women. These racist's ideas about "good hair" stemming from European colonialism affect how some Black women feel and talk about their hair. However, even those women who do appreciate their natural hair, sometimes find that it may not be acceptable among their white peers nor is it necessarily beneficial to their professional or academic success. Thompson (2009) argues that Black women's hair still hold political meanings. Someone women may choose not to go natural not because they do not like natural hair but rather they fear, they will be unemployable or will not be seen as attractive to males.

Back in the summer of 2007, the associate editor of Glamor Magazine held a presentation for about 40 women lawyers at the offices of Cleary Gottlieb in Manhattan, in which she gave the “dos and don’ts ” of corporate fashion. All was well and good until she reached the slide that had an African-American women wearing and afro hairstyles with a caption that read “just say no to the fro.” Many of African-American women in the audience were outraged. Glamour later fired the associate editor in order to separate themselves from the scandal (Dorning 2007). However, the associated editor remarks are not far from what is expected in the workplace. She only got called out because she made the mistake of saying it in public.

CHAPTER FIVE: OTHER CAMPUS EXPERIENCES

During our interviews, the women in my study mention other experiences on campus that do not fit specifically into a category of beauty, but are unique to Black women's experience on White campuses.

The Dating Scene

Initially I did not have questions about the dating scene for Black women on majority White; however, the topic came up on a few occasions. The responses were interesting and I wished I had addressed the topic with all my participants.

Carrie currently has a boyfriend but says she was open to the idea of dating guys outside her "race"; however, she felt the White males on campus were not interested.

> I always felt like, it seemed like the white males have always kind…maybe I don't know if I'm intimidating or maybe they're just not use to the… um they never dated a black girl before or anything like that. But I always felt like I wasn't attractive to them because of my skin tone. Whereas for me it was just like if I find you attractive I find you attractive. I always felt, you know, that they looked at me as 'she's Black, I don't even look at her that way'.

She says that it could all be in her head, but she does say that she has never been approach by a white male sent she has been attending Georgia College.

Lily, who is Carrie's roommate and also attends Georgia College says that she finds that most Black women are looking for a Black man. However, Black men are not necessarily looking for a Black woman. Also, because the Black community on campus is so small you have a lot of friends dating each other, which results in drama. So I asked if any of the White men were interested in the Black women. Lily feels that the while White men may be interested, they are shy about approaching Black women. In reference to the dating scene for Black women in general, she commented: "Nonexistent [laughs]! Thank you, thank you, that will be all [laughs]."

She continued:

> Don't look at the White boys because they won't be looking at you, pretty much. You just don't, I mean… the Black guys, they're dating all the other plethora of diverse women that are on campus and you are not their object of their attraction because they feel like they can get you anyway. 'I am the epitome of what a Black man is supposed to be; Intelligent, good looking, (even though some of them aren't) and I attend this institution so I have to be the stuff.' And for the White boys or the Asian guys… there aren't too many of us on campus so they don't have to come to us. They don't have to feel like they need to be attracted to us. So the dating scene for us, for Black women is pretty much nonexistent. We don't, you don't date. You don't go to college to date. You don't go to graduate school to date. For what?

Naomi also says when she goes out with her friends that the White men always want to dance with the Black women, but the Black women never get the dates. She laughs, but she says the White guys may want to dance with them because of the overly sexualized perceptions of Black women they may have acquired from watching music videos.

Campus Activities

Tori explains that when you go to a White school you can get overlooked. Tori is a part of the Delta sorority and she says that Black sororities and fraternities are not as recognized on a predominantly white campus. If you go to Georgia College and State University's website they have a Greek Life page. There are pictures of the White fraternities and sororities but none of the Black ones. This year for homecoming their sororities and fraternities set up tents about side. Every year the Black sororities and fraternities are placed in the back and their tents are over looked. This year they demanded that they get a spot near the sign up booth just so they could be seen. Also, Tori says that during nominations for homecoming queen and king, you will have several tables of white sororities around campus campaigning. She could be walking through campus with a White girl passed the rows of tables, and the other White students behind the tables will says hello and offer refreshments to the White girl, but no one will say anything to her. Tori does not understand why they are scared to talk to her just because she is Black. She finds situations like this to be hurtful.

On Rachel's campus at the University of Alabama, there have been several incidents where White students will call other Black students racial slurs and nothing is ever done about it. Rachel says that after a football game she has had another male student call her a nigger. There was another incident where a Black student reported a couple of White males who were a part of one of the fraternities on campus, but all the university did was send out a letter apology to the Black students on campus who may have been offended. Nothing was done to the White males. The next day, written in chalk along the sidewalks of the quad was written, "You Niggers need to get over it." Rachel says the White fraternities can get away with anything. All they ever get is a slap on the wrist. If a Black fraternity were to do anything wrong they would get there fraternity house taken from them immediately.

In the Classroom

Some of the women expressed the need to prove that they belong at the school and felt that had to do better than the other students in the class. Naomi expresses that she feels she needs to excel beyond her peers and professors expectations. Lily echoes the same things. She says when she is in a classroom she feels like she has to prove that she is not only here because of affirmative action.

Rachel explains that in her English class one semester she was the only Black student in the class. The students in the class were conversing back and forth and Rachel tries to enter into the discussion. When she comments no one acknowledges that she spoke so she tries again, thinking that maybe they just did not her hear, but they still ignore her. Rachel says that made her want to work harder than the other students in the class. She says she was making all A's in that class. She wanted to prove that she was not just some Black girl in the class that they could ignore.

Rachael says that just trying to have casual conversation with the other students in her class is difficult. For example:

> …if they talk about something that I knew about I would probably make a comment like 'oh yeah, I remember that. Are you talking about the so and so?' and then they'll just…I guess they won't hear me or something, I don't know. But after like a couple of time of actually like, just putting in a little something to get like some type of feedback, even like a head node would work. They literally don't say anything to me. I'm like okay I get it. It makes sense.

Both Lily and Naomi express feelings of being ignored by their white peers. I asked Naomi this is and she laughs saying: "It's more like a secret, like a hidden thing, like a non- . . . more of a gesture it's not necessarily them coming to me and saying 'I don't think you're beautiful. You don't look this way, so you're not beautiful.' Um but it has been more of an avoidance." Lily describes this similar experience not as an outward voicing of non-acceptance, but as this organic shifting apart. She could not pinpoint what exactly it was, but she says there are non-overt ways to ostracize a person.

Naomi explains that she and two other Black women are the only Black people in the department. When the students have to pair off into groups to work on assignment the three of them always end up working together. When the professor assigns partners, forcing one of the white students to work with her, she says it is awkward:

> They don't know what to say. I feel like sometimes they only see you like 'I got to work with the Black girl in the group.' Or sometimes it's like… it always has nothing to do with the project at hand. It's more so it starts off, 'wow your hair is so cool. Can I touch it.' And it's like as their going in [she brings her hand toward my head and touches my hair] you know. You didn't give them permission yet, but they're already in there [laughs]. It's kind of like that. I'm like okay; can we talk about what we're doing here? And when we get on that [the assignment], they're usually conversing with the people around them. And then I say something and it's like 'oh, let's not talk about that right now. Let's not talk about the school work. Let's not talk about your opinion right now. 'Cause we're not going to get… we're going to make sure our opinions are validated and then we'll get to you.' You know. If I want to select a certain issue or topic to talk about um it's almost obsolete. You really have to push for it.

The examples above express this feeling of not feeling important or as significant as their white peer. They feel as if they are being avoided or their opinions in class do not matter. Their organizations on class are not seen as valuable. Even in the dating scene they do not feel they are seen as desirable partner among their white males and sometimes Black men as well.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

Although the way the women who participated in the researcher perceived themselves and their bodies varied, the way they defined beauty was greatly similar. I associated this similarity in perception to their level of Black cultural pride. Those who were perceived to have a sense of pride in being Black and a self-awareness of how their blackness affects their experience in a White-dominated society, I found to define beauty in nontangible ways. Beauty was a way of being rather than a physical trait or one's appearance. From their perspectives, beauty came from within. Beauty is intelligence. Beauty is not harsh or aggressive. Those who are beautiful are kind, gentle, and confident. Lastly, for them, beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Beauty defined in this sense is open and not as exclusive as physical definitions of beauty. Their definitions imply that anyone can be beautiful. In addition, when I asked for physical features they found attractive, many said things like, "people who smile," or they told me that everyone as some feature about them that makes them attractive.

Those who seemed to have less pride in Black culture used physical aspects to define beauty, and some tried to conform to mainstream beauty standards. They did say that they found people who were happy as beautiful but they also believed that beautify was taking care to dress the body properly and making sure to care for one's hair, and skin. They also perceived Black women in general in a negative light. At times they described other Black women as people who did not know how to dress themselves fashionably or appropriately for their body type.

When participants were forced to look at how they felt about their own bodies, their responses revealed varying levels of acceptance of mainstream beauty ideals. Black women not only felt they needed to conform to White ideals, but there were expectations that they had to negotiate within the Black community as well as beauty ideal from other racial groups. Some women re-

vealed that they fell short of beauty ideals even in the Black community. Some of these preferences are for women with curves, “good hair,” and light skin.

In terms of body image some women felt that they needed to be thinner or have tight abs or thighs. However, they did not think their negative feeling about their bodies had anything to do with their peers or mainstream body ideals. This is what Bourdieu (1990) would call symbolic violence. Symbolic violence often goes unnoticed and is maintained through the day to day habits. In the case of beauty, the habitus is shaped in part by the constant media images of thin White women, and the lack of many dark skinned women in media images. Or the plethora of diet advisements, unconsciously instilling that fat is bad. These types of images are often misrecognized as violence because they are constantly reproduced and presented to the world with little questions, and therefore naturalized. Because of this misrecognition the dominated group or those who do not fit these images, begin to internalize the beliefs of the dominant group. By internalizing these beliefs, the power or ideas of the dominant group is seen as legitimate and the oppression of the dominated group is perpetuated. This is also seen when some of the women talk about their hair. The fact that one woman describes her hair as not pretty or slave hair reflects this internalization of racist’s ideas about what “good” hair deriving from European colonialism and slavery.

Although some women are internalizing White mainstream beauty norms, other are not. Also, some follow mainstream standards not because they believe them to be better, but because they feel it will help them fit in or be perceived has professional by their peers or professors. This is particularly relevant for Black women on majority White campuses. Lily told me that if she had to choose between a look that she like best and one that she perceived her peers to favor, she would go with what her peers would be comfortable with. A few of the women felt that natu-

ral hair was seen by White peers and professors as rebellious, militant or unprofessional. As a result some would try to an appeal to their white peers by pressing it or even adding weave. Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003) call this "shifting. Black women shift back and forth in order to appeal to their white peer and the Black community, by altering their bodies as well as their behavior. Black women find themselves conforming to multiple beauty expectations, and even those within the Black community they may find they do not live up to. Participants who were thin felt they did not embody Black ideals of beauty. Also, some women with felt they did not have what would be considered "good" hair or light complexioned skin that is also greatly favored in the Black community.

As a whole many Black women struggle with images and personal perceptions of their hair and skin, but women's experience at majority white intuitions are unique in that fact that they have to negotiate between what they find as beauty and what their white peers will accept as beautiful. Many also feel like they have to regulate themselves so that they do not accidently reinforce racial stereotypes about Black women; stereotypes that say they are promiscuous or hypersexual. The fact that Lily chooses not to wear snug fitting jeans like her White peers, (who she said do not have butt like she does), so she does not come off as a video girl, reflects this need to self-regulate and debunk stereotypes. Overall many Black women on White campuses feel like they are constantly made aware of their Blackness, and they have to think about how they will come across to their White peers. As Du Bois describes it:

> After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, The Teton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, the sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity (Du Bois 1908: 168).

Even in the Obama era of the twenty-first century, Du Bois words still speak truth to the experience of many Black people. Many of the women in my study are trying to evaluate, their behavior, their actions, and their appearance through the lens of their peers in order to fit in or feel accepted. Their white peers are privileged in the fact that they rarely have to think about being White or what their race implies to others. Nor do their White peers have to consider how their race will impact their academic or professional careers. In Western society whiteness is naturalized and White peers or colleagues will rarely encounter nonwhite ways of thinking or knowing, and are accustom and blind to their privilege (Edwards 2008; Lewis 2004; Simpson 2008). As a result of Whites' social dominance they are able to racialize others without necessarily developing their own racial consciousness. (Lewis 2004). In return, Black women are racialized by their White peers, but are also expected to conform to their White peers' cultural and social beliefs and ways of thinking in order to be accepted as equals.

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APPENDIX: PARTICIPANT PROFILE

Rachel
Age: 19
School: University of Alabama
Year: 2010 – 2011, Sophomore
Major:
Skin: medium brown
Before attending college Rachel attended schools that were multiracial.

Mio
Age: 22
School: Savannah College of Art and Design
Year: 2007 – 2010
Major: Sequential Art
Skin: light brown
Mio was a sequential art student at SCAD for 3 years before leaving. She is also interested in Fashion and makeup. She is currently taking classes at Georgia State University. Before college, Mio attended majority white schools from elementary school to high school.

Alexis
Age: 22
School: Savannah College of Art and Design / Macon State
Major: Fashion
Skin: dark brown
Alexis was a fashion major at SCAD for four years before leaving. She went to Macon State to study cosmetology

Rose
Age: 27
School: Auburn University
Major: B.A. in Spanish and Business, M.A. in Hispanic Studies
Year: 2002-2008
Skin: Light brown/medium brown
Rose received her Bachelor's and Master's degree from Auburn University. She studied Spanish and Business and Hispanic Studies. Rose attended a majority white elementary, middle, and high school before college

Nina
Age: 21
School: Georgia College and State University
Year: 2010 – 2012, Senior
Skin: light brown
Before attending Georgia College she went to Berry College for two year. She was homes schooled throughout elementary and high school. Her home school group was majority white.

Baylor
Age: 24
Schools: University of Georgia and Emory University
Years: UGA 2005 – 2009, Emory 2009 – 2012
Major : Law
Skin: light brown
Baylor received her Bachelor's degree at the University of Georgia. Baylor is currently a law student at Emory and plans to graduate spring 2012. She spent one year at a majority black middles school during eighth grade but attend a majority white elementary, middle, and high school before college.

Naomi
Age: 25
School: University of Michigan
Years: 2010 -2012
Major: Environmental Public Health
Skin: dark brown
Before attending the University of Michigan Naomi received her Bachelors in Environmental Science from Spelman College, a historically Black college. Naomi plans to graduate from University of Michigan spring 2012. The school she attended throughout elementary, middle and high school, were all majority Black schools.

Lily
Age: 22
School: Emory University
Major: Chemistry
Skin: medium brown
Year: 2007-2011
Lily graduate from Emory in spring 2011 and is currently applying to medical school. She presently works at Emory doing research on HIV/AIDS

Tori
Age:20
School: Georgia College and State University
Year: 2009-2012, Senior
Major: Psychology
Skin: light brown
Tori will be the first one in her family to attend and graduate from college. Prior to college she attended a majority white elementary school that was out of her home district. However, her middle school and high school was majority Black.

Carrie
Age: 21

School: Georgia College and State University
Year: 2008 – 2012, Senior
Major: Chemistry
Skin: medium brown
Before attending college she attended majority white elementary, middle and High schools. For one semester she attended a majority white High school, but was uncomfortable and left the following semester.