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Women of Color in
Popular Culture



EDITED BY ALMA M. GARCIA

Chapter Six

Hey Girl, Am I More than My Hair?

*African American Women and Their Struggles with
Beauty, Body Image, and Hair*

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Throughout history and to present day, African American women have challenged white definitions of beauty. What or who is considered beautiful varies among cultures. What remains consistent is that many notions of beauty are rooted in hegemonically defined expectations. While definitions of beauty affect the identities of everyone, this article focuses on African American women and the intersection between beauty, body image, and hair. Specifically, this article looks historically at how differences in body image, skin color, and hair haunt the existence and psychology of black women, especially since one common U.S. societal stereotype is the belief that black women fail to measure up to the normative standard. Two theoretical frameworks guide my analysis of beauty standards: Afrocentric theory and standpoint theory. I argue that the continuance of hegemonically defined standards of beauty not only reify white European standards of beauty in the United States, but also that the marginalization of certain types of beauty that deviate from the "norm" are devastating to all women. Further, the unrealistic expectations of beauty and hairstyle reify the divisions that exist between African American and Euro American women.

First, in order to understand African American women and the intersection between beauty, body image, and hair, this article juxtaposes beauty standards of African American and Euro American women, reviewing them through historical and current lenses. Second, I consider the theoretical frameworks of standpoint theory and Afrocentric theory as a means to eluci-

date beauty issues. Third, aspects of body, image, and race are discussed. Finally, I explore the possibility of redefining standards of beauty and “normality” through black beauty liberation.

AN HISTORICAL REVIEW OF BEAUTY: BLACK BEAUTY VS. WHITE BEAUTY

“I want to know my hair again, the way I knew it before I knew that my hair is me, before I lost the right to me, before I knew that the burden of beauty—or lack of it—for an entire race of people could be tied up with my hair and me.”
—Paulette Caldwell, “A Hair Piece” (2000, 275)

Beauty is subject to the hegemonic standards of the ruling class. Because of this, “beauty is an elusive commodity” (Saltzberg and Chrisler 1997, 135) and definitions of beauty vary among cultures and historical periods. Beauty issues and subjection to dominant standards are not the sole domain of black and white women. For example, while all cultures have had, and continue to have, various standards of beauty and body decoration, the Chinese practice of foot binding was one that forced women to conform to beauty ideals that reified patriarchal privilege and domination. “The Chinese may have been the first to develop the concept that the female body can and should be altered from its natural state. The practice of foot binding clearly illustrates the objectification of parts of the female body as well as the demands placed on women to conform to beauty ideals” (Saltzberg and Chrisler 1997, 135).

An example of other types of beauty being rendered “voiceless” is found in Fiji. After the export of American television shows to Fiji, the rates of anorexia and bulimia increased exponentially. Further, the women of Fiji, who tend to have larger, rounder body shapes and are brown-skinned, not only became very conscious of the fact that their body shape did not meet Euro American standards, but their skin did not as well (Lazarus and Wunderlich 2000). While this article focuses on beauty standards between black and white American women, this Fijian incident shows that adherence to white standards of beauty, as well as to American standards of beauty, can be exported to other countries with, in this case, devastating consequences. The following literature review historically chronicles some of the effects two cultures, black women and white women, have faced in relation to beauty issues and body image.

Black Beauty

Women of color looking for answers through an introspective gaze or through their communities in order to counter white hegemonically defined standards of beauty is not a new occurrence. Historically and into modern times, African American beauty has been disparaged. As much of the literature on African American women and beauty has pointed out, African American women have either been the subject of erasure in the various mediated forms or their beauty has been wrought with racist stereotypes. According to Michele Wallace,

the black woman had not failed to be aware of America’s standard of beauty nor the fact that she was not included in it; television and motion pictures had made this information very available to her. She watched as America expanded its ideal to include Irish, Italian, Jewish, even Oriental [sic] and Indian women. America had room among its beauty contestants for buxom Mae West, the bug eyes of Bette Davis, the masculinity of Joan Crawford, but the black woman was only allowed entry if her hair was straight, her skin light, and her features European, in other words, if she was as nearly indistinguishable from a white woman as possible. (1979, 157–58)

While mediated images of beauty have become more diverse (e.g., Tyra Banks, Naomi Campbell, Tomiko, Alex Wek, and Oprah Winfrey), “biases against Black women based on their physical appearance persist” (Jones and Shorter-Gooden 2003, 178) and many black women do not feel “free” from mediated beauty standards. Some historically popular yet recurring negative manifestations of African American beauty include the oversexed jezebel, the tragic mulatto, and the mammy figure.¹ Therefore, it is clear that the notions of black beauty and black inferiority are inextricably bound.

Given the racist past and present of the United States, there are several identity and beauty issues that African American women face. Since 1619, African American women and their beauty have been juxtaposed against white beauty standards, particularly pertaining to their skin color and hair. During slavery, black women who were lighter-skinned and had features that were associated with mixed progeny (e.g., wavy or straight hair, white/European facial features) tended to be house slaves and those black women with darker-skin hues, kinky hair, and broader facial features tended to be field slaves. This racist legacy and African American internalization of this white supremacist racial classification brought about what Jones and Shorter-Gooden have termed “The Lily Complex.” This complex is defined as “altering, disguising, and covering up your physical self in order to assimilate, to be accepted as attractive. . . . As Black women deal with the constant pressure to meet a beauty standard that is inauthentic and often unattainable, the lily complex can set in” (2003, 177). The desire to change her outer appear-

ance to meet a Eurocentric ideal may lead her to loathe her own physical appearance and believe that “Black is not beautiful . . . that she can only be lovely by impersonating someone else” (177).

According to Greene, “the United States idealizes the physical characteristics of white women and measures women of color against this arbitrary standard” (1994, 18). To challenge white beauty as the stereotypical *de facto* standard against which all women are measured, middle-class and lower middle-class black women formed Black Ladies societies to uplift the race to a level equal to or exceeding that of a white woman.

To achieve this, it seemed necessary to make her more of a lady, more clean, more proper than any white woman could hope to be. As if to blot out the humiliation of working in the white woman’s kitchen all day, of being virtually defenseless before the sexual advances of white men, black women enacted a charade of teas, cotillions, and all the assorted paraphernalia and pretensions of society life. It was a desperate masquerade which seemed to increase in frenzy as time went on. . . . Black women began to turn their heads in Charlotte Forten’s² direction, even if their economic circumstances prevented them from imitating her standard of living. Many fewer looked to the examples of Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth, whom no man in his right mind would want, except, perhaps, patient Uncle Tom. (Wallace 1979, 156–57)

Wallace challenges the concept of assimilation.³ Creativity in hairstyling can be a challenge to assimilationist notions of beauty (regardless of style worn) because it can challenge perceived expectations. When hair must be straightened for employment or for social mobility, it can be seen as assimilationist—subscribing to dominant cultural standards of beauty. However, as Orbe and Harris noted, in an organizational situation an organizational member must balance her identity. “Just as [a] young woman must negotiate her identities, so must an organizational member who comes from an underrepresented racial/ethnic group. Some organizational members may feel their racial/ethnic identities become less important as they climb the ladder of success” (2001, 192). However, engaging in organizational social mobility does not mean that one will automatically assimilate or substitute her cultural, racial, and ethnic identity for that of the majority culture. Rather, women can take creative measures in surviving the organization and being true to one’s self. One way is with appearance. While individually not all African American women valorize white beauty standards, African American women have had to invent their own beauty measures. In utilizing the uniqueness of African hair textures, which range from the kinky curls of the Mandingos to the flowing locks of the Ashanti (Byrd and Tharps 2001, 1), blacks have been very creative in hairstyling. In the early fifteenth century hairstyle for the Wolof, Mende, Mandingo, and Yoruba signaled age, ethnic identity, marital status within the community, religion, war, and wealth (2–4). Hairsty-

ling sessions were a bonding time for women. A hairstylist always held a prominent position in these communities. “The complicated and time-consuming task of hair grooming included washing, combing, oiling, braiding, twisting, and/or decorating the hair with any number of adornments including cloth, beads, and shells. The process could last several hours, sometimes several days” (5–6). The most common hairstyles the Europeans encountered when they began exploring the western coast of Africa in the mid-1400s included “braids, plaits, patterns shaved into the scalp, and any combination of shells, flowers, beads, or strips of material woven into the hair” (9). During this time period hair was not only a cosmetic concern, but “its social, aesthetic, and spiritual significance has been intrinsic to their sense of self for thousands of years” (7). Realizing the prominence hair played in the lives of western Africans, the first thing enslavers did was shave their heads; this was an unspeakable crime for Africans, because the people were shorn of their identity (10).

Throughout the centuries of slavery, scarves became a practicable alternative to covering kinky, unstyled hair or hair that suffered from patchy baldness, breakage, or disease. For example, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, because slaves did not have traditional styling tools and were not given combs, they developed new hair implements. One development was a “sheep fleece carding tool” (13), which was used to untangle their hair. Additional household hair care included “bacon grease and butter to condition and soften the hair, prepare it for straightening, and make it shine. Cornmeal and kerosene were used as scalp cleaners, and coffee became a natural dye for women” (17). Hairstyles were often determined by the kind of work a slave performed. If one was a field slave and lived in separate slave quarters, “the women wore head rags and the men took to shaving their heads, wearing straw hats, or using animal shears to cut their hair short” (13). If a slave worked directly with the white population, e.g., barbers, cooks, housekeepers, they often styled their hair similarly to those of whites. For example, house slaves were required to have a “neat and tidy appearance or risk the wrath of the master, so men and women wore tight braids, plaits, and comrows” (13). Black male slaves, like upper class white males, chose to wear wigs in the eighteenth century or “styled their own hair to look like a wig” (13).

Emulating white hairstyles, particularly straight hair, signified many things in the black community. First, straighter hair was associated with free-person status. Light-skinned runaway slaves “tried to pass themselves off as free, hoping their European features would be enough to convince bounty hunters that they belonged to that privileged class” (17). Emulating whiteness offered a certain amount of protection. Second, lighter-skinned straight-haired slaves “worked inside the plantation houses performing less back-breaking labor than the slaves relegated to the fields” (18). Because of this,

these slaves had better access to clothes, education, food, and “the promise of freedom upon the master’s death”(18). However, the “jealous mistress of the manor often shaved off the lustrous mane of hair, indicating that white women too understood the significance of long, kink-free hair” (19).

Thus, as has already been shown, adopting many white European traits was essential to survival; for example, free vs. slave; employed vs. unemployed; educated vs. uneducated; upper class vs. poor. Issues of hair straightening were hotly contested in the black community. The practice was viewed as “a pitiful attempt to emulate whites and equated hair straightening with self-hatred and shame” (37). The most vocal opponents of hair straightening were W. E. B. DuBois and Booker T. Washington (see Byrd and Tharps 2001, 37–40)—both men were light-skinned black males with wavy hair and Marcus Garvey. All of these men had influence in the African American community. With regard to the issue of hair, Garvey proclaimed, “Don’t remove the kinks from your hair! Remove them from your brain!” (38). However, most black women felt straightened hairstyles were not about emulating whites but having modern hairstyle. Madame C. J. Walker was one of the more popularly known hairstylists who helped African American women achieve modern hairstyles.

In the twentieth century, the 1905 invention of Madame C. J. Walker’s hair softener, which accompanied a hair-straightening comb, was the rage.⁴ Hair straightening was a way to challenge the predominant nineteenth-century belief that black beauty was ugly. According to Rooks, “African Americans had long struggled with issues of inferiority, beauty, and the meaning of particular beauty practices. . . . [Walker] attempted to shift the significance of hair away from concerns of disavowing African ancestry” (1996, 35). Walker’s beauty empire, therefore, not only contributed to higher self-esteem among the black community, but also created a new job industry for those who attended her beauty schools.

Hair straightening has continued to be a controversial beauty move by some in the African American community, particularly after the 1960s’ and 1970s’ “Black is Beautiful” social movement. For example, Malcolm X spoke out against hair straightening due to the belief he had had that hair straightening caused black people to feel ashamed of their own unique beauty, as well as the belief that hair straightening emulated white standards of beauty. However, hair straightening, as Taylor challenged, “has taken on such racialized significance that participation in the practice can be a way of expressing black pride rather than a way of precluding it” (2000, 668). Additionally, straightening one’s hair is not synonymous with racial shame or “acting white.” Jones and Shorter-Gooden argued that “Not every woman who decides to straighten her hair or change the color of her eyes by wearing contacts believes that beauty is synonymous with whiteness. Trying on a new hairstyle, one often associated with Europeans, does not automatically im-

ply self-hatred. It is possible to dye your brown tresses platinum and still love your Blackness” (2003, 178). While blond straightened hair and colored contacts are still controversial and seen as assimilationist to many in the African American community, hair-straightening also may be an expression of creativity or for employment reasons. As Wallace noted, “White features were often a more reliable ticket into this society than professional status or higher education. Interestingly enough, this was more true for women than it was for men” (1979, 158). In addition to straightened hairstyles, other hairstyles that African American women use in order to define their own beauty include afros, braids, dreadlocks, and knots. All of the aforementioned hairstyles carry with it signs of beauty, boldness, rebellion, self-confidence, spiritual consciousness (Jones and Shorter-Gooden 2003, 187) and whether intended to or not, a challenge to white beauty standards.

African American and Latina women have adopted many strategies when confronting white standards of beauty from society in general, as well as from African American and Latino men in their communities: “Latino and African American men seem more often than white men to link long hair with attractiveness for women of all ages” (Weitz 2001, 672). The three most common standards of white beauty in the United States that women are subject to include: (1) women’s hair should be long, curly or wavy—not kinky—and preferably blond; (2) women’s hair should look hairstyled—this requires money and time; and (3) women’s hair should look feminine and different from men’s hair (Weitz 2001, 672). Due to the fact that beauty is subject to the social conditions of racism, sexism, and classism, few women are able to attain such nebulous standards. Through the development of strategies, African American women demonstrate Disch’s claim that “Expectations for what constitutes femininity and masculinity are frequently affected by race, class, culture, and other factors. The freedom to be the kind of woman or man a person might like to be is greatly curtailed by sexism, poverty, racism, homophobia, and other cultural constraints and expectations” (1997, 20).

White Beauty

Saltzberg and Chrisler noted that “beauty cannot be quantified or objectively measured; it is the result of the judgements of others” (1997, 135). However, it is fair to say that in the United States, and in many countries that are influenced by the United States (largely through mediated forms), the current standard of beauty is a white, young, slim, tall, and upper class woman, and some take extraordinary measures in order to meet such standards.

Constituting itself as the site of absolute presence, whiteness functions as an epistemological and ontological anchorage. As such, whiteness assumes the authority to marginalize other identities, discourses, perspectives, and voices.

By constituting itself as center, non-white voices are Othered, marginalized and rendered voiceless. Whiteness creates a binary relationship of self-Other, subject-object, dominator-dominated, center-margin, universal-particular. (Yancy 2000, 157)

Adherence to white beauty standards also can be traced throughout the centuries and since many of these beauty standards largely, but not exclusively, affected white women, the standards mentioned below can be juxtaposed against African American beauty standards. As Saltzberg and Chrisler illustrated, sixteenth-century European women “bound themselves into corsets of whalebone and hardened canvas. A piece of metal or wood ran down the front to flatten the breasts and abdomen. This made it impossible for women to bend at the waist and difficult to breathe” (1997, 136). In the seventeenth century, the waist was still cinched, but fashions were designed to enhance the breasts. “Ample breasts, hips, and buttocks became the beauty ideal, perhaps paralleling a generally warmer attitude toward family life” (136). In the eighteenth century, corsets were still worn; however, the introduction of large crinolines exaggerated the smallness of the waist and made movement difficult (The Victorian Era, n.d., n.p.). In the nineteenth century, wearing corsets and, paradoxically, dieting to gain weight, became popular in Europe and North America. Physicians and clergy spoke against the use of corsets because the tight lacing often led to “pulmonary disease, internal organ damage, fainting (also known as “the vapors”), and miscarriages” (Saltzberg and Chrisler 1997, 136).

In the twentieth century and twenty-first century, beauty trends continue to fluctuate. For example, in the 1920s slender legs, hips, and small breasts were popular. “Women removed the stuffing from their bodices and bound their breasts to appear young and boyish” (Saltzberg and Chrisler 1997, 136). In the 1940s and 1950s, the hourglass shape (e.g., Marilyn Monroe) was popular. In the 1960s, a youthful, thin body and long, straight hair were popular. In the 1970s, a thin, tanned physique and the “sensuous look was ‘in’” (137). In the 1980s, the mesomorph body type was preferred (thin, but muscular and toned body) with large breasts. In the 1990s, two dichotomous beauty images prevailed: (1) the heroine-chic, gaunt, waiflike body with some breasts and (2) the very thin body with large breasts. “Small breasts [were] a disease that required surgical intervention” (137). In the beginning of the twenty-first century, youthful, slim body types with large breasts are still preferred.

There are several things learned from this brief history of body image. First, women were subjected to hegemonically defined standards of beauty. Second, history, and our knowledge of history and women, in general, privileges and largely traces Euro American body-image issues. Third, women currently continue to be held to hegemonically defined standards of beauty.

For example, modern beauty standards encompass tattoos, piercing (belly button, chin, ear, eyebrow, labia, nipples, nose, tongue), high-heeled shoes, tight jeans, curlers, perms, straighteners, diet aids, liposuction, plastic surgery, botox injections, skin lightening, and gastric bypass. All of the above are costly, but the physical costs of altering the body to attain hegemonic standards of beauty can range from breast cancer [“silicon leaks in some implants have resulted in breast cancer” (Saltzberg and Chrisler 1997, 137)], to anorexia, bulimia, and emotional stress.

Finally, it is clear from these beauty standards that not all types of whiteness are valued. Many Euro American women cannot measure up to the white normative standard of beauty promoted—beautiful, blondhaired, slim, tall, virginal, and upperclass. Because of this exclusionary standard of beauty, not all Euro American women emulate the stereotypical white woman; only a few women are privileged to be in this “beautiful” club. Those Euro American women who deviate from this standard of whiteness are displaced like ethnic minority women for their departure from “pure” white womanhood. In order to challenge the homogenized standards of beauty, standpoint theory and Afrocentric theory are appropriate theoretical frameworks to use.

STANDPOINT THEORY AND AFROCENTRIC THEORY

Standpoint Theory

In general, standpoint theory advocates the inclusion of all people and perspectives rather than reifying the status quo or inverting the current hegemonic order. Further, it focuses on how the circumstances and culture of one’s life influence her or his perspective, values, beliefs. “Standpoint theory focuses on how gender, race, class and other social categories influence the circumstances of people’s lives, especially the social positions they have and the kinds of experiences fostered within those social positions” (Wood 1994, 51). According to Allen, Orbe, and Olivas feminist standpoint theory “seeks to expose both acts of oppression and acts of resistance by asking disenfranchised persons to describe and discuss their experiences with hope that their knowledge will reveal otherwise unexposed aspects of the social order” (1999, 409). Standpoint theory can create cleavages in and assist in subverting the status quo because “To establish a woman’s and ethnic minority woman’s standpoint is to prepare to challenge hegemony” (Patton 2004, 198). To attempt to validate the self by resisting the oppositional binary system of either/or and embrace both/and (a dialectical perspective) is transformative and moves toward engaging in dialogue.

Standpoint theory coupled with Afrocentric theory is an extremely powerful critical tool in which to examine body image, hair, and race. Afrocentric theory is another way to redefine and confront the marginalization and racist beauty standards felt by all women. Asante's Afrocentric theory has allowed for a centering of Africans and the African diaspora in research and practice. This move is important since African experiences in communication have often been analyzed through a European framework (Asante 1998). As Clifford illustrated, the black diaspora seems to be "complexly related to Africa and the Americas, to shared histories of enslavement, racist subordination, cultural survival, hybridization, resistance, and political rebellion" (1997, 252). Therefore, diaspora represents transnationality, political struggles, local community, and historical displacement (252). The aforementioned struggles contribute to the fluidity and fixity of diaspora and the diasporic consciousness, which ultimately impacts one's social and cultural inclusion or dislocation. Afrocentric theory "rejects the notions and practices of hegemonic or alleged universal tendencies and practices of a given paradigm" (Berkie 1994, 136–37). Additionally, Afrocentric theory seeks to develop agency through collective consciousness (Asante 1998). As Berkie stated, "Afrocentricity is an intellectual pursuit that endorses humanistic mission. This mission is pursued by first affirming our own humanity. It is pursued by defining and naming phenomena that emanate from our own experience. . . . It is about exercising one's agency. It is a theory that seeks to empower, free the mind, and ring the bell of harmony" (148).

Therefore, Afrocentricity is not to be placed above other perspectives but equally beside other cultural theories and historical contexts. Afrocentric theory challenges hegemony by moving the Euro standard from a hierarchical norm to a horizontal equalizer. Afrocentricity also allows for a performative nature of beauty. With its focus on humanity, the diversity one can find through Afrocentric theory is transformative. Afrocentric theory is important because it "embraces an alternative set of realities, experiences, and identities" (Delgado 1998, 423). One need not necessarily be African or African American to embrace Afrocentricity and conduct Afrocentric research (Asante 1991). A woman cannot only exercise agency with her beauty choices, but Afrocentricity creates a performative space of creativity and acceptance that has room for all types of beauty because it is no longer in the context of a Euro-supremacist framework. There is not an adherence to any beauty standard but a celebration of the self. This celebration of self is challenged through Eurocentric beauty standards of body image, hair, and race.

BODY IMAGE AND RACE

"It rained and thundered just beautiful. I got soaked, but I love to walk and play in the rain, except my hair doesn't. I wish it would be alright for us Negro[e]s to wear our hair natural. I think it looks good but it's not [ac]cepted by society. Any way I got soaked anyway, hair & all and mommy nearly had a white child (Valerie Turner [Valerie Jean], June 12, 1968, age fourteen)."
—Valerie Turner, "Part Two: Searching for Self" (1994, 77)

As the American standard of beauty continues to be stringent and marginalizing, "many women develop distorted body images and become frustrated with not being able to obtain the 'ideal figure'" (Molloy 1998, 1). Unlike Euro American women who are plagued by waif-like images they cannot attain, African American women are relatively positive about their body image. However, this is due to the fact that African American women tend to have different stereotypes to demythologize. A 1998 20/20 television broadcast questioned the different ways in which African American and Euro American women see themselves. The 20/20 broadcast found that Euro American women, as compared to African American women, tend to be more prone to anorexia and bulimia due to the mediated body images that tell women what they need to look like. Euro American women see their body image and beauty reified and accepted by mainstream society, as opposed to African American women whose body image has traditionally been defiled. Despite reification of Euro American images, a variety of reasons have been given concerning why Euro American women tend to be more prone to anorexia and bulimia, and why African American women deal with anorexia and bulimia to a lesser degree.

According to Molloy, there are four reasons. First, African American women "believe that African-American males prefer larger women, they have less need to lose weight, and therefore, feel more attractive." Whereas Euro American women "believe that white men prefer ultra-thin women" (1998, 2). Second, African American women are more likely to describe themselves using androgynous traits, whereas Euro American women use feminine traits. "Masculine and androgynous individuals exhibit higher levels of self-esteem, have more positive body image, and are more satisfied with their sexuality than those who are feminine or undifferentiated" (2). Third, ethnic identification may play a role. "To the extent that [African American women] interact mostly with other African-Americans, they may be 'protected' from white norms regarding body styles" (2). Fourth, socioeconomic class may impact body image. According to Allan, Mayo, and Michael (1993) as cited in Molloy, "lower socioeconomic African-American women were heavier and perceived heavier body styles as more attractive than did higher socioeconomic black women and white women of all soci-

oeconomic groups” (1998, 2). Additionally, African American women who tended to be heavier were slower to identify themselves as overweight as compared to Euro American women, and tended not to “denigrate their weight as much as those who tend to interact with women who are thinner” (Molloy 1998, 3).

Finally, according to the study shown on the 20/20 broadcast, only 10 percent of Euro American women were happy with their bodies due to the pressure Euro American women feel about their bodies and beauty expectations. Conversely, 70 percent of African American women were happy with their bodies (1998). However, while research has shown that African American women tend to have a more positive attitude about their body image than white women, as Lester and Petrie noted, “the idea that all African American women are protected fails to take into account the reality of within group individual differences and the complexities associated with developing a self-image within an oppressive and racist society” (1998, 315). African American women, like all women, are constantly exposed to Euro-centric messages and images that question beauty standards outside the dominant realm. Some African American celebrities such as Halle Berry, Star Jones, and Oprah Winfrey have struggled with beauty image issues.

In addition, many African American women (younger and older generation), including those who grow up in predominantly Euro American areas, state that they are beginning to feel pressure to conform to the white standard of beauty. For example, while research about women of color and anorexia and bulimia is an under-researched area, Crago, Shisslak, and Estes found that eating disorders were more frequent among Hispanic and Native American females and less frequent among black and Asian American women (1996). However, they also found that risk factors associated with eating disorders were more common among ethnic minority women who were younger, heavier, better educated, and more identified with Euro American middle-class values.

In a 1999 University of Alabama survey of 3,700 black and white women and men, researchers found that “Black women were more invested in their physical appearance than White women and that Black and White women had similar levels of dissatisfaction with body and weight size ... heavy Black women were more satisfied with their weight than heavy White women” (Jones and Shorter-Gooden 2003, 180–81). However, this research does not belie the fact that black women, like their white counterparts, experience dissatisfaction with their body and feel pressure to conform to normative beauty standards. Sometimes this conformity can take dangerous and drastic measures in the form of anorexia and bulimia. For example, 7 million women have been diagnosed with eating disorders (National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders n.d.). The cost of treating anorexia nervosa and bulimia often includes medical monitoring, treatment, and therapy

often over a two-year period or longer. Treatment is expensive: \$30,000 or more a month for outpatient treatment; \$100,000 or more for inpatient treatment (n.d.). An eating disorder is something that women, regardless of race or ethnicity, as well as men, may face; the disease does not discriminate.

These hegemonically defined Euro American beauty standards are not only dangerous, they are “created and maintained by society’s elite. Racism, class prejudice, and rejection of the disabled are clearly reflected in current American beauty standards” (Saltzberg and Chrisler 1997, 140). For example, the high cost of various beauty regimens such as cosmetics, tanning salons, perms, hair straighteners, gyms, diets, nice clothes, and plastic surgery eludes, excludes, and marginalizes poor women who cannot afford the high cost of fulfilling hegemonically defined beauty standards. Butler argued that gender is performative and is “produced as a ritualized repetition of convention” (1995, 31); beauty and hair are also performative. Haircare and styling become a performance in adherence to beauty standards. In listing the multiple ways in which women come to perform beauty, hairstyling for African American women not only becomes a performance or ritual in hegemonically defined beauty, but also hair is performed as a way for the marginalized to attempt to become centered in a world of beauty that tends not to value African American forms of beauty. African American beauty is the antithesis of white beauty, “white” hair, and “white” norms.

According to Wood, “appearance still counts. Women are still judged by their looks. They must be pretty, slim, and well-dressed to be desirable” (1994, 83). Lorde found that “institutionalized rejection of difference is an absolute necessity in a profit economy which needs outsiders as surplus people” (1997, 177). This quote aptly supports the ideology of racism and sexism; an ideology of gender relations that states one type of gender is superior to another, one type of woman superior to another, and one type of beauty is superior to another. As Wilson and Russell indicated, “if the two groups of women were better informed of each other’s beauty issues, they would realize that their seemingly contradictory attitudes about tan skin were actually driven by the same underlying concern: improved social status” (1996, 75). Women who “fit” the social construction of the stereotypical woman may have a better chance of getting [the] jobs as opposed to those who do not fit the standardized model of beauty. “Those who were judged to be attractive were also more likely to be rated intelligent, kind, happy, flexible, interesting, confident, sexy, assertive, strong, outgoing, friendly, poised, modest, candid, and successful than those judged unattractive” (Saltzberg and Chrisler 1997, 141). An ideology of race and gender relations that states that one racial group is superior to another is embedded in cultural symbols that support, justify, and maintain the current hegemonic order—a hegemonic order that supports race inequalities among women. Saltzberg and Chrisler summing up a study by Faludi (1991) noted that, “American women have the

most negative body image of any culture studied by the Kinsey Institute" (1997, 138). Further, "Asian American and African American women have sought facial surgery in order to come closer to achieving the Euro-American beauty ideal" (Faludi 1991 in Saltzberg and Chrisler 1997, 140). As a result of "falling victim" to Euro American standards of beauty, hog lard (used during slavery), hot combs, curling irons, and formulas and solutions such as Madame C. J. Walker's hair softener were invented to help straighten curly hair. Assimilation into American society by changing hair is a very effective campaign. According to a 1997 American Health and Beauty Aids Institute (AHBAI) survey, "African Americans spend \$225 million annually on hair weaving services and products" (Byrd and Tharps 2001, 177). In fact, although African Americans comprise about 12 to 13 percent of the U.S. population, "Black women spent three times as much as White women on their hair care" (Wilson and Russell 1996, 92). During the teen years the focus on assimilation to beauty standards, regardless of race, is prevalent.

As girls grow and mature and become women, one of the only items over which they have control is their hair. Perhaps the focus on beauty is to appear attractive to the opposite sex or play the role for which women are socialized—concern for beauty. Whatever the reason, "hair becomes such a major preoccupation for adolescent girls of both races that their self-esteem can actually rise and fall with every glance in the mirror" (Wilson and Russell 1996, 81). As Wilson and Russell also discovered, issues of hair can become politicized at this time: Euro American women needed constant feedback on their looks, whereas for African American teen girls, "hair decisions are subject to more critical feedback from friends, because hairstyles are laden with political overtones" (1996, 81). These political overtones can be seen when an African American woman wears a weave, or cuts her hair short, or wears a natural style, or when she dyes her hair blond which "smacks of White assimilationism to many in the Black community" (91). However, the range of beauty and hairstyles embraced by African American women can have an effect on employment opportunities.

Failure to work toward the Euro American beauty ideal can result in such consequences as the loss of a job. For example, some African American women have lost their jobs due to their hairstyle preference, which was deemed "too ethnic." The 1981 case of *Rogers v. American Airlines*, "upheld the right of employers to prohibit the wearing of braided hairstyles in the workplace" (Caldwell 2000, 276). In 1987, the Hyatt Regency, outside of Washington, D.C., using the 1981 precedent, forced Cheryl Tatum to resign after she came to work wearing cornrows and refused to have them taken out. She was told that she was in violation of the company policy (Caldwell 2000). According to Tatum, the Hyatt manager (a woman) stated, "I can't understand why you would want to wear your hair like that anyway. What do our guests think if we allowed you to all wear your hair like that?"

(Caldwell 2000, 284). In 1988, Pamela Mitchell was asked to leave her job at the Marriott Hotel in Washington, D.C., for refusing to remove her braids. Another case in 1988 concerned Renee Randall who was fired from her job with Morrison's Cafeteria because her multi-colored ponytail was "too extreme" (Wilson and Russell 1996, 88). In 2001, New York Federal Express and UPS offices were both facing religious discrimination lawsuits for firing employees with dreadlocks, which are a requirement of the Rastafarian religion (France 2001). Similar lawsuits pending around the country include claims against "police departments and prison authorities, schools and retailers, alleging that rules against knotted locks unfairly single out Rastafarians in particular and African Americans in general" (France 2001, n.p.). What these firings and ultimately lawsuits show is a lack of understanding by non-African Americans regarding hairstyle diversity and an enforcement of white standards of beauty. Subsequently, after the lawsuits many corporate grooming policies were changed to include braids and cornrows as an "acceptable hairstyle." Federal Express employees who seek a waiver against company appearance standards may "tuck their locks under uniform hats" (France 2001, n.p.). Despite this acceptance, "psychotherapists have noted increased reports from their black women clients of guilt, shame, anger, and resentment about skin color, hair texture, facial features, and body size and shape" (Saltzberg and Chrisler 1997, 140).

The fact remains that outside the African American community there is little appreciation and positive reification for African American beauty. This lack of appreciation can have a devastating effect on self-esteem. According to West, "this demythologizing of black sexuality [beauty] is crucial for black America because much of black self-hatred and self-contempt has to do with the refusal of many black Americans to love their own black bodies—especially their black noses, hips, lips, and hair" (1994, 122). However, physical and facial features equated with African Americans produce their own beautiful counter-narrative. For example fuller lips, tan skin, body curves, and curly hair are fashionable. Women who do not naturally have these beauty attributes pay to have what African Americans tend to have naturally by visiting their dermatologist, tanning salons, buying padded undergarments, or going to their hairstylist. In addition, the popularity of models such as Sudanese-born Alex Wek provides a visual and popular counter-narrative to white physical and facial beauty features. Unfortunately, the difficulty is finding this counter-narrative in the same abundance in which we find white beauty standards.

MEDIA STEREOTYPES: BODY IMAGE, HAIR, AND RACE

Historically, the relationship between African American women and their hair goes back to the days of slavery and is connected with the notion of the color caste system: the belief that the lighter one's skin color, the better one is and that straighter hair is better than kinky hair. This thinking creates a hierarchy of skin color and beauty that was promoted and supported by slave masters and slavery. The woman with the wavy hair was considered more attractive and had "good" hair, as opposed to the woman with the kinky hair who had "bad" hair. The notions of "good" hair and "bad" hair come from the social construction of beauty standards. According to Wallace, "the black community had for quite some time been plagued by color discrimination. The upper echelons of black society in particular tended to rate beauty and merit on the basis of the lightness of the skin and the straightness of the hair and features" (1979, 158). These notions are still maintained in some portions of the African American community and in the media.

In the media, many of the African American women who are glorified for their beauty tend to be lighter-skinned women who have long, wavy hair. However, this reification of the beauty standard does not come solely from the African American community but also from the Euro American community, which promotes the acceptable standard of beauty. All one has to do is pick up a hairstyle magazine for African American women and see that many of the models have very light skin (some models could be mistaken for Euro Americans), some have blue or green eyes, and most of them have long, straight or wavy hair. A few notable exceptions include Tyra Banks, Naomi Campbell, Tomiko, and Alex Wek. Despite these exceptions, it is important to note that while these models may have their own definition of beauty, the media may promote or single out a more Eurocentric-looking model because Euro American standards of beauty are paramount and mediated standards of beauty promote adherence to whiteness.

The performance of beauty comes to us through a variety of mediated images that we are bombarded with daily. These messages of beauty largely encompass ways in which women can make themselves look better, skin products that can tone, redefine, and take away age. Subsequently we learn that beauty is one of the defining characteristics of a woman. For example, among the numerous beauty products advertised on television are hair products. Most often the hair commercials show Euro American women tossing their bouncy, shiny, long, straight hair. Even humorist Erma Bombeck observed that,

after watching supermodels Cindy Crawford and Christie Brinkley push what appear to be pounds of hair off their face over and over again there would be time to do anything else. These people can't carry a package, eat hot dogs,

wave, or shake hands. Every second of their lives is consumed with raking their fingers through their hair and getting their sight back. (Wilson and Russell 1996, 82)

This image, while directed toward Euro American women, impacts African American women, because it is often not our image that becomes the vision and standard of beauty. We are socially constructed through language and mediated images to believe that what makes a woman beautiful is not her intelligence or her inner beauty but her outer beauty.

HISTORICAL RESISTANCE: BODY IMAGE, HAIR, AND RACE

As James Baldwin said, "The power to define the other seals one's definition of oneself" (n.d., n.p.). Whether intended or not, hair makes a political statement. To counter hegemonic Eurocentric standards of beauty black women in the past and present continue to create resistant strategies as their beauty was not and is not predominantly represented. The resistant strategy used by Africans and African Americans was in the counter-hegemonic creation of unique hairstyles that showcased both black beauty and creativity, whether it was through the use of curls, dreadlocks, plaits, scarves, waves, weaves, wigs, and ornamentation in the hair. Popular resistant strategies were most visibly seen during the Black Power movement that simultaneously promoted the "Black is Beautiful" campaign.

For example, as bell hooks indicated, the Black Power movement of the 1960s challenged white supremacy in many areas, and one area briefly challenged was hair. What this social movement did with slogans such as "Black is Beautiful" was work to "intervene in and alter those racist stereotypes that had always insisted black was ugly, monstrous, undesirable" (1995, 120). The Black Power movement raised and challenged the ingrained stereotypes of beauty that were and are perpetuated by Euro Americans. The movement also examined the psychological impact such beauty standards had on African American girls and women. First, the Black Power movement "sought to value and embrace the different complexions of blackness" (hooks 1995, 121). This meant that African Americans would examine the racist notions behind the divisive color caste system.

Second, the Black Power movement agenda allowed for an examination of children who suffered discrimination and who were "psychologically wounded in families and/or public school systems because they were not the right color" (122). This allowed for an examination of the effects of the color caste upon children. Third, African American women stopped straightening their hair. This means that there was a decade of acceptance for "natural" hairstyles. Fourth, many people who had stood passively by observing the

mistreatment blacks received on the basis of skin color, “felt for the first time that it was politically appropriate to intervene” (122). Finally, in addressing issues of skin color and hair, African Americans could “militantly confront and change the devastating psychological consequences of internalized racism” (122). Hair, therefore, became one of the tools or mechanisms that African Americans could utilize in order to confront the damaging Eurocentric standards of beauty that African Americans were unable to attain. For a brief moment, African Americans were able to create and reify their own standards of beauty.

However, the progressive changes made during the Black Power movement eroded as assimilation became more dominant in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s. As African Americans were told that the key to American success was through assimilation of hairstyle and dress, many African American women began to press or chemically straighten their hair again and “follow the latest fashions in *Vogue* and *Mademoiselle*, to rouge her cheeks furiously, and to speak, not infrequently, of what a disappointment the black man has been” (Wallace 1979, 172). Many women found that it was easier to don wigs, weaves, or undergo expensive chemical processes in order to replicate mainstream hairstyles rather than wear their hair in an afro, braids, or dreadlocks which may convey a political statement or socioeconomic status. According to hooks, “once again the fate of black folks rested with white power. If a black person wanted a job and found it easier to get it if he or she did not wear a natural hairstyle, etc. this was perceived by many to be a legitimate reason to change” (1995, 122).

Consequently, white standards of beauty became the norm and became further reified by both African Americans and Euro Americans in their communities and through mediated images. Assimilation, in essence, made African Americans more socially mobile. This assimilation also “meant that many black folks were rejecting the ethnic communalism that had been a crucial survival strategy when racial apartheid was the norm and were embracing liberal individualism. . . . Consequently, black folks could now feel that the way they wore their hair was not political but simply a matter of choice” (hooks 1995, 123). Not everyone saw African American hairstyles as a “freedom of choice.” This can be seen from the Euro American reaction to braids and cornrows at work. In addition, the color caste system was back in place. This system pitted light-skinned African American women against dark-skinned African American women. African American men once again returned to valuing highly desirable white or lighter-skinned women with long hair, as opposed to lighter-skinned or darker-skinned African American women who may have chosen to wear shorter or natural hairstyles. The return to the overt and internalized system of assimilation to the Euro

American standard of beauty not only created rifts between African American women but also pitted African American and other women against one another.

In the 1990s through the present, African Americans have begun to use a resistive strategy of acceptance. In this counter-hegemonic turn, beauty differences within the black community are considered good, because one is being creative in their own individual beauty standard, rather than looking for outside acceptance. According to Susan Taylor (20/20 1998), editorial director of *Essence* magazine, African American women, have not traditionally seen themselves represented positively in any mediated form, so African American women create their own standard of beauty. Because of this counter-hegemonic creation, there is a wider range of beauty norms among African American women and more acceptance of different body types and weights. Some of the African American women interviewed for the 20/20 segment said that they do not concern themselves with weight, but rather they look at the whole package: hair, disposition, dress, style, and the way a person carries herself (1998). With this counter-hegemonic strategy in place, this approach begs the questions: who determines difference? and who determines which differences matter? These questions are best answered using standpoint theory and Afrocentric theory because they allow for a cultural critique of hegemony and beauty.

BLACK BEAUTY LIBERATION: CHALLENGING HEGEMONICALLY DEFINED BEAUTY NORMS

Signified meanings over time by people, groups, and politics become fixed to a group and can impact identity. Rather than being fluid, identities become trapped in the marginalizing rhetoric that initially erected the boundary. Boundaries not only define the borders of nations, territories, communities, and imaginations of the mind, but also they define the limits of space, place, and territory (Cottle 2000). One marginalized demarcation point is understanding and appreciation of difference—appreciation of African American beauty. The boundaries of beauty become deeply entrenched and thus are accepted as “common sense.” The fictions and narratives about African American women exist, but without thoughtful understanding and knowledge, the dialectical tension between body image, hair, and race will continue to exist and contribute to oppression and marginalization. In order for bridges of understanding to be built, the boundaries of beauty need to be redefined and the borderland of marginalized beauty needs to be centered.

How do we transcend the interlocking system of domination that reifies the hegemonic order to the detriment of all women? Marable found that “the challenge begins by constructing new cultural and political identities, based on the realities of America’s changing multicultural, democratic milieu” (2000, 448). According to Moon, “it might be more useful to think of identity as a habit rather than an essence. Identity-as-habit is an idea that allows both for the ingrainedness of habits (as anyone who has attempted to break a long-term habit can attest) and for the possibility of movement away from such habits” (1998, 324). One way to enact “identity as habit” is to think of African American women and the intersections between beauty, body image, and hair through the lens of womanism and black beauty liberation.

Standpoint theory and Afrocentric theory support a womanist critique of beauty, body image, and hair. Both theoretical perspectives are important in allowing for a critique of marginalizing Eurocentric beauty standards. First, standpoint theory allows for a centering of individual experience and allows for a space for that story to be told. This space for alternative narratives and experiences allows room for acts of oppression and resistance to be exposed. Standpoint theory also considers how social categories, like gender, race, sexuality, and socioeconomic class influence our lives. Finally, standpoint theory allows one the ability to validate the self by resisting participation in the continuance of the hegemonic order.

Second, Afrocentric theory is complementary to standpoint theory because it allows for a centering of black people and black experiences. Just like in standpoint theory, Afrocentric theory allows room for acts of oppression and resistance to be exposed. In this case, it allows the centering of black beauty and counter-hegemonic experiences to be exposed. Afrocentric theory also allows room for the possibility of diversity in beauty and diversity in beauty standards among this group. Rather than this theory being rigid, Afrocentric theory is used in a dynamic way that allows one to be able to look at the beauty diversity within black women, instead of treating all black women as a monolithic group. Just like in standpoint theory, Afrocentric theory allows one the ability to validate the self by resisting the continuance of hegemony. Finally, Afrocentric theory allows one to see the diversity among black women in terms of body image, body size, hair, and skin color because of the focus on valuing the personal experience, allowing one to name and define her own experience(s). As Delgado aptly stated, Afrocentric theory, “embraces an alternative set of realities, experiences, and identities” (1998, 423). Through embracing alternatives, Afrocentric theory shatters the myth that black women constitute a monolithic group because one is allowed to be considered intragroup diversity

In using the standpoint/Afrocentric theoretical matrix, the ideas behind Alice Walker’s womanism are complementary because

Hey Girl, Am I More than My Hair?

womanism also advocates the inclusion of the traditionally oppressed and marginalized, as well as promotes consciousness raising for both the oppressor and oppressed. Womanism recognizes that society is stratified by class, gender, ethnicity, race, and sexuality, however, the placement of race, the importance of race, and the experiences ethnic minority women have had to deal with regarding race and racism are central and key points in womanism. (Patton 2001, 242–43)⁵

It is through this framework that I offer a womanist liberatory Black Beauty Liberation campaign. Much like the “Black is Beautiful” campaigns of the 1970s, African American women need to be liberated from the confines of white-dominated standards of beauty. A womanist Black Beauty Liberation campaign would encompass a black or woman of color whose beauty issues (e.g., body image, hair, and race) are brought in from the margin to the center in an attempt to honor the beauty in her that has been reviled, rebuffed, and ignored. To be a black beauty liberationist means that you are not identified with the powers that be, but rather directly challenge the white supremacist hegemony that has kept your beauty and your body invisible, marginalized, and stereotyped.

To create a revolution of beauty it is not enough that “creative” style challenges to white beautification be accepted only by celebrities or by “radical” professors. The acceptance of these marginal groups still means that the majority of women are marginalized based on white supremacist beauty standards. In the standpoint/Afrocentric theoretical matrix, the visible invisible center is decentralized. A direct challenge to hegemonic beauty standards comes under critique as black women define their beauty standards—not the white center defining it for them.

For example, in a commodification of the Other through whites setting the beauty norms then coveting aspects of otherized beauty, while at the same time rejecting the Other, we find that many white women are incorporating black beauty standards into their regime. For example, injecting collagen into their lips to get the full effect that African American women have naturally, tanning in order to achieve the natural brown skin of African Americans, and padding the derriere in order to have a fuller backside. What these few differences show is that beauty concerns and the expectations of living up to and fulfilling the stereotypical socialized role of “woman” is something that unites women since we all have to endure the scrutiny. Without understanding and respecting beauty differences in general, women face alienating and stereotyping one another, rather than becoming a united force. As Wallace noted “white men, white women, black men, and black women are just an accumulation of waste—wasted hope and wasted cockiness, born of insecurity and anxiety, which help to keep us all in our respective places” (1979, 130). We need to understand the implications and history behind the standards of beauty. “Being a Black woman in the 21st century means that you

ly different from being a White woman because of the different histories that lie behind each social identity or point of intersection, but alliances can be formed across these differences if both parties consent to the repression of difference involved" (Fiske 1996, 93). By resisting ascribed identities, we may begin to challenge the notion of beauty as it is currently defined because we are critically and actively challenging hegemony. Through the standpoint/Afrocentric matrix we are able to challenge the hegemonic narratives that confine beauty into binaries of white-beautiful, black-ugly.

Such libratory stances against white supremacist beauty have taken place; however, it is now time to directly challenge the assimilated beauty standards that are continually promoted through the media. Reality TV shows like *Extreme Makeover* and *The Swan* attempt to produce the same type of woman—one who maintains hegemonic beauty standards—that no woman can naturally attain. Through an oppositional beauty gaze an appreciation of black beauty has flourished in children's books [e.g., *Happy to be Nappy* (*Jump at the Sun*), by bell hooks; *Nappy Hair* by Carolivia Herron] and in hairstyles beyond straightened styles (e.g., afros, dreadlocks, and twists are again considered stylish for black musical artists, athletes, and on college campuses). However, these venues are not enough to promote the feeling of beauty acceptance on a large scale. With liberation comes a critical transformation. "Liberation means challenging systemic assumptions, structures, rules, or roles that are flawed" (Harro 2000, 463). Through liberation and challenging the systems of domination that exist in regard to body image, hair, and race, a recentering of marginalized beauty can begin. For example, black communities have already taken smaller steps that have led to some success in redefining beauty whether through lawsuits or in their own practices. In order to be a liberated self, white hegemonic beauty needs to be challenged. Instead of succumbing to the white supremacist status quo, African American women need to continue to challenge the norm. We need to demand the same recognition of diversified black beauty. As Spellers noted, "Silencing the stories of marginalized groups aids in the creation of a dominant discourse. By studying personal stories, the tendency to naturalize one's experiences of reality as a universal experience of reality becomes minimized and we come to understand that there are different ways of knowing" (1998, 72). Through acknowledging and recognizing that other forms of beauty exist in the world beyond white supremacist definitions, we come to understand that there are different types of beauty in the world. One of the more immediate effects of beauty challenges can be seen in mediated diversity largely on "black" television shows on UPN: *Girlfriends* and *Kevin Hill* both showcase a variety of hairstyles and skin colors. And *Ally McBeal* was the first "white" show that featured an African American female main character with naturally curly, non-straightened hair.

BEAUTY IDENTITY: TO BEGIN AGAIN

Challenging and redefining the self, ingrained identities, and white hegemony is very difficult. "These stereotypes and the culture that sustains them exist to define the social position of black women as subordinate on the basis of gender to all men, regardless of color, and on the basis of race to all other women. These negative images also are indispensable to the maintenance of an interlocking system of oppression based on race and gender that operates to the detriment of all women and all blacks" (Caldwell 2000, 280). Debunking the myth of what is beauty would require Euro American women to say "the hell with what men think" and African American women would have to say "the heck with what all of White culture thinks" (Wilson and Russell 1996, 85). This is quite a difficult position for all women and even more so for African American women because African American women have to challenge an entire race of people and system of thought. As a society, we seem to forget our rhizomatic past (Gilroy 1993), a past that is impacted by the diasporic connections between people and cultures. For example, much of what once was African or African American culture is now mainstream and worldwide: pierced ears, nose, nipples, and other body parts come from the twelfth century and were introduced to Euro Americans once Africans were enslaved; music (spirituals, gospels, jazz, rock, blue grass, country, rap, and hip hop) all have origins or have been influenced by African or African American culture. "No matter what a woman does or doesn't do with her hair—dyeing or not dyeing, curling or not curling, covering with a bandana or leaving uncovered—her hair will affect how others respond to her, and her power will increase or decrease accordingly" (Weitz 2001, 683). Until we critique the message of stereotypical standardizations of beauty, African American women, and all women in general, and the disparagement of their beauty, we will never get past the wall of misunderstanding, sexism, and racism. As hooks stated, "Everyone must break through the wall of denial that would have us believe hatred of blackness emerges from troubled individual psyches and acknowledge that it is systematically taught through processes of socialization in white supremacist society" (1995, 131). We will not only continue to cause self-esteem and psychological damage to women and to African American women specifically, but we will continue to pass on our sexist and racist ways to generations of young people. We have all seen the devastation that societal standards of beauty wreak upon women: psychological damage, loss of self-esteem, anorexia, bulimia, sexism, racism, ignorance, and lack of communication. The language, verbal and nonverbal, as well as the reification of white standards of beauty needs to be challenged and will continue to be challenged as women create their own standards of beauty.

NOTES

1. For a thorough analysis of stereotypes, see Donald Bogle's (2001) seminal book, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretative History of Blacks in American Films*.
2. Charlotte Forten of Philadelphia was "one of the tiny minority of free, educated black women of the nineteenth century." She came from a middle-class abolitionist family "who did not differ appreciably from their well-off white neighbors in demeanor and values." She was a teacher at an integrated grammar school in Salem "charged with teaching the Negroes all the necessary rudiments of civilization . . . until they be [sic] sufficiently enlightened to think and provide for themselves." Despite her status, she suffered racist incidents from whites and berates herself for not being worthy enough or intelligent enough. Although her "contemporaries described her as a handsome girl, delicate, slender, attractive, whereas she saw herself as hopelessly ugly" (Wallace 145, 147–49).
3. Yep defines assimilation as a "view [that] directs the marginalized person to try harder and harder to adhere, obey, and follow the rules of the dominant group—rules that he or she can never fully and completely participate in creating" (80). Martin and Nakayama (2000) state that "In an assimilation mode, the individual does not want to maintain an isolated cultural identity but wants to maintain relationships with other groups in the new culture. And the migrant is more or less welcomed by the new cultural hosts. . . . When the dominant group forces assimilation, especially on immigrants [or U.S. ethnic minority groups] whose customs are different from the predominant customs of the host society, it creates a 'pressure cooker'" (1998, 207).
4. Madame C. J. Walker did not invent the hot comb. Marcel Grateau, a Parisian, used "heated metal hair care implements as early as 1872, and hot combs were available in Sears and Bloomingdale's catalogues in the 1890s, presumably designed for white women" (Princeton n.d.).
5. Alice Walker created the term "womanism." Walker's definition of womanism found in Smith, states that "womanist comes from the word 'womanish': Opposite of 'girlish,' i.e., frivolous, irresponsible, not serious. A black feminist or feminist of color. From the colloquial expression of mothers to daughters. 'You're acting womanish,' i.e. like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous, or willful behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered 'good' for one. Interested in grown-up doings. Acting grown-up, being grown-up. Interchangeable with other colloquial expression: 'You're trying to be grown.' Responsible. In charge. Serious" (1983, xxii). A womanist or black feminist critique makes one aware of the exclusive nature of feminism as it has been popularly articulated by white, educated, middle-class women (Wood 1994). Womanists believe that challenging patriarchal oppression and sexism is equally important with fighting against racism. Therefore, articulating a type of feminism that shows how the twin oppressions of racism and sexism are interrelated is paramount, as both are necessary in fighting against a system built on oppression.

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