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Why is My Hair Micromanaged in the Workplace? Black Women and Natural Hairstyles in the Federal Government

Darnella McGuire-Nelson

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Why is My Hair Micromanaged in the Workplace?
Black Women and Natural Hairstyles in the Federal Government

by

Darnella McGuire-Nelson

A Dissertation Presented to the
Halmos College of Arts and Sciences of Nova Southeastern University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
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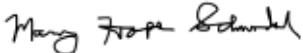
Nova Southeastern University
2024

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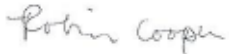
This dissertation was submitted by Darnella McGuire-Nelson under the direction of the chair of the dissertation committee listed below. It was submitted to the Halmos College of Arts and Sciences and approved in partial fulfillment for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Conflict Analysis and Resolution at Nova Southeastern University.

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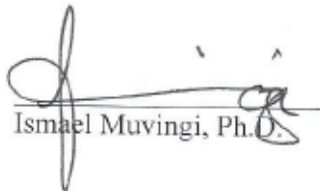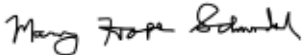Dedication

I dedicate this work to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, to which all blessings flow. I dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Steve Nelson, who exhibited the ultimate love and patience through my dissertation journey. This work is also dedicated to my children Darnell, Ajay, and Dakota, and my grandson Khyrie. To my mother, Beatrice McGuire, who has been a witness to my life and academic journey. You provided unconditional love and sacrificed so that I might have these wonderful experiences. This dissertation is also dedicated to the memory of my departed father, Iley Rudy McGuire, and brother Darnell McGuire. You are both forever in my heart and soul. This work is also dedicated to my friends, extended family who encouraged me to keep going. Last but not least, this dissertation is dedicated to my informal mentors Dr. Elizabeth Clark-Lewis and Dr. Tiffany Rice who encouraged me and told me to hit send – I am forever grateful for your support.

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For they refreshed my spirit and yours also. Such men deserve recognition.

1 Corinthians 16:18

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To the 15 beautiful women who volunteered their time to meet with me and so graciously told their stories, I thank you from the bottom of my heart. Your voices were heard.

Thank you to my 'village' that prayed and supported me. Thank you to Deborah Fowlkes Woolford who always took my calls and prayed for me, even when she was in the grocery store. You knew what I needed. Thank you to my classmates, Dr. Adrian Carter, Dr. Henry Lawrence, Calvin Bradley, Jr., and Timothy Wingate for being my accountability partners. You all are awesome.

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List of Acronyms

BFT .... Black Feminist Thought

BIPOC ....Black, Indigenous, and People of Color

CAQDAS ....Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis

CLF .... Civil Labor Force

CFT .... Critical Feminist Theory

CRT .... Critical Race Theory

EEOC .... Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

FEORP .... Federal Employment Opportunity Recruitment Program

FY ....Fiscal Year

GS .... General Schedule

IRB ....Institutional Review Board

MD-715.. Management Directive

OPM...Office of Personnel Management

QL .... Qualitative Research

SES.. Senior Executive Service

Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the impact on the career advancement of Black women in the federal government who choose to wear their hair in its natural textured state. The researcher used a structural narrative approach and thematic analysis, guided by the following research question: What are Black women's experiences when they choose to wear their hair in its natural state as they seek career advancement in the federal government? The two major theories used in this study to elucidate participants' experiences were structural violence and intersectionality. The following theories provided insight and context to intersectionality: critical race theory, critical feminist theory, and Black feminist thought. Data analysis provided an emergence of six themes: (1) respectability politics; (2) gendered microaggressions; (3) health (4) lack of meaningful diversity, equity, and inclusion; (5) financial implications; and (6) authenticity/identity/liberation. The study's results illuminated the conflicts and barriers that Black women encounter in the Federal government as they seek to advance their careers. The results provide opportunities for organizational leaders to address the root causes of conflicts and barriers associated with the marginalization of Black women.

Keywords: Black women • African American Women • Hair • Microaggressions • Authentic • Respectability Politics • Intersectionality • Structural Violence

Chapter 1: Introduction

Black women have, on one hand, always been highly visible, and so, on the other hand, have been rendered invisible through the depersonalization of racism.

- Audre Lorde

Imagine being discriminated against for wearing hair the natural way it grows out of one's head. Black girls are being disciplined in schools for this reason: for not conforming to the mainstream of Eurocentric standards with perceptions of unkept and second-class hair which they feel causes distractions in the classroom, threatening Black girls' rights to an education (Essien & Wood, 2021). It is no secret that there is a negative impact on the self-esteem and self-confidence of Black girls. The degradation of these acts sets the juxtaposition of these Black girls growing into Black women. As intersectionality teaches us that Black girls' issues are exacerbated, it is noted that Black young men are facing similar issues. High school student Darryl George of Houston, Texas has been in an alternative school or served in-school suspension since August 31, 2023, because his school district said the length of his locs violated school policy (Lozano, 2024). In February 2024, a judge ruled in favor of the school district indicating that the school policy is not discriminatory as the policy does not violate the CROWN Act as the CROWN Act does not specifically speak to the length of natural hairstyles (Lozano, 2024). The dehumanization does not end in the classroom. It continues in the workplace, from corporate spaces to Hollywood. Actress Shalita Grant of NCIS New Orleans narrated leaving her dream job on the franchise television show to preserve the health of her hair. Ms. Grant felt that working in New Orleans was dehumanizing. She stated that one of the reasons for her departure was the producer's lack of concern for her

hair texture (Powell, 2020). She explained, "I found myself utterly wrecked after three years on a television show that decimated my natural hair and self-image" (Powell, 2020, p. 1). This was her violence. Grant further explained how she developed alopecia and was threatened with baldness during her tenure in the drama series (Powell, 2020). Shalita Grant chose not to be subjugated by the continuous degradation of her identity.

Hair challenges of Black women are not only relegated to Hollywood or just in the United States. The challenges and discrimination that Black women face are a global phenomenon. A study was conducted in Cape Town South Africa at a predominately White academic institution. Researchers observed racial markers of identity in the field of academia and how Black women must negotiate their hairstyles as a coping mechanism to lessen the impact of discrimination (Knight & Long, 2019). There are similar scenarios in the United States. In the workplace, Black women who want to embrace their identity through their expressions of hair, feel pressured to conform to Eurocentric standards (Dawson et al., 2019).

The abundance of media coverage on black hair conveys that Black women and girls must present in specific ways for the majority group—in this instance, White people—to feel comfortable. This leads to the concept of respectability politics, a strategy for self-presentation that African American women have historically used to counter negative stereotypes that emphasize the morality of the dominant norms while de-emphasizing sexuality (Pitcan et al., 2018). There are three main facets to respectability politics. First, there is support to juxtapose the 'respectable us' versus 'shameful them' (Ward, 2008; Wolcott, 2013). Next, it embraces values that counter negative stereotypes. Third, respectability politics makes impressions that align with the White middle class

(Warner, 2015). Actress Shalita Grant's refusal to engage the norms of the dominant group to counter the negative stereotypes imposed on Black women and natural hair illustrates her decision to preserve her identity.

Women have made strides working in the federal government over several decades since the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, with the inclusion of the sex act. According to the Office of Personnel Management's (OPM) Federal Equal Opportunity Recruitment Plan (FEORP) for 2013, women represented 43.4% of the federal workforce, 10.6% of whom were Black women (OPM, 2013). There have been no significant changes over the last seven years. In 2020, Black women represented 10.9% of the Federal workforce (OPM 2020). A paucity of data lends to the need for research on this topic. When the latest data was retrieved from the OPM website, the researcher could aggregate the data by race, gender, and grade level. However, the researcher could not obtain specific breakdowns due to a different operating system and how OPM allows data to be aggregated.

OPM FEORP report also shows that Black employees at the GS-12 grade level peaked but declined for grades GS-13 to Senior Executive Service government wide. The statistics are based on the civilian labor workforce (CLF) of the Bureau of Labor Statistics. CLF are percentages represented by groups. The Office of Personnel Management defines underrepresentation.

Underrepresentation, as defined in 5 CFR, section 720.202, means a situation in which the number of women or members of a minority group within a category of civil service employment constitutes a lower percentage of the total number of

employees within the employment category than the percentage of women or the minority group constitutes within the CLF of the United States. (OPM, p. 6)

Although the Black women in the federal government are not underrepresented as compared to the CLF, there are other concerns. The federal government is the largest employer in the world, with approximately 2,191,362 employees as of March 2023 (www.fedscope.omp.gov). OPM posits that the federal government should reflect the country's rich diversity. However, according to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (2023), in the federal sector, "The participation rates of African American women in leadership positions were lower than then their participation in the Federal workforce. . . and earned $12,597 less than other civil employees and $9206 less than all women" (p. 3).

This problem has been addressed through several executive orders, policies, and acts. The signing of Executive Order 14035 by President Biden in 2021 is an initiative to promote diversity and Inclusion within the federal government that addresses systemic racism and gender inequality (White House, 2021).

For many Black Americans, the federal government has been the employer of choice for economic stability and growth. However, many Black women working in the federal government face the challenge of being judged by their cultural identity, such as choosing to wear their hair in its natural state, rather than by merits and content of character. As these women explore their cultural identity, it may appear that the laws established to protect them from discrimination are not doing enough.

It is important to look at Black women's entrance and survival in the federal government and the impact of being their authentic selves. This research study seeks to

explore and understand the plight of Black women's career and economic advancement in the federal government, specifically regarding their choice to wear their hair in its natural textured state.

Background of Problem

Bissoy (2018) explains, "Blackness is not a monolith—it is a complexity-rich and beautiful identity that is uniquely expressed worldwide" (p. 1). In other words, how Americans define blackness is not the same as how Ghana or Brazil would define blackness as they look at it through different lenses. This is a relevant topic as Black women are not a monolithic group, as some would believe. They come from diverse backgrounds from all parts of the world. They are American, African, Caribbean, European, etc. Although society attempts to use politically correct demonstratives to embrace diversity, placing Black women in the category of "people of color" may not be appropriate as this can be seen as an erasure of their existence, as their diaspora is different from that of Hispanics, Asians, Indigenous Peoples, etc. While using the term is meant to be inclusive, it becomes exclusive as one size does not fit all. Widatalla (2019) suggested that "Any effort that sees the struggles of all minorities as a single movement is actually harmful" (p. 1). Acting as if Black women are a monolith group distorts the true conversation in addressing race, gender, and policies affecting Black women and their experiences. They encompass vast cultures in society that may include their educational background, religion, socio-economic status, differing abilities, language, and age.

Many African American women living in the United States who are descendants of slaves share a historical background that is linked to slavery. Slavery dehumanized

everything about the Black woman, including their natural hair. Before the Transatlantic slave trade or middle passage, hair was a vital part of ancient African traditions, symbolizing marital status, wealth, and religion and denoting geographical regions of African women (Powell, 2019). Slave masters made women slaves wear scarves as there was no time for them to be concerned with hair since they were mere property (Powell, 2019). This signaled the beginning of the pervasiveness that stigmatized hairstyles women slaves wore and Black women's hair, laying the foundation for the journey to hair discrimination in the workplace for Black women (Powell, 2019).

In 2016, the Eleventh Circuit decided that, professionally, Black women's natural hairstyles could legally be limited to only the afro (Powell, 2019). In essence, other natural hairstyles worn by Black women, such as locs, braids, or twists, could be banned in the workplace. Thus, Black women's hairstyles are being micromanaged to meet Eurocentric standards set by the majority White race.

When the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed, it prohibited discrimination based on race, religion, national origin, and color, in employment, public schools, and public places. However, when the bill was first proposed, it did not include sex (Fisher, n.d.). In fact, Democratic Congressman Howard Smith of Virginia, added the amendment to the bill to kill the measure, as he was a staunch opponent of civil rights. His strategy did not have the desired effect as the H.R. 7152 was signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson. When the government began implementing policies, there was no mention of discrimination based on sex. Although President Johnson resolved the problem with Executive Order 11375, the effects of the Executive Order on White women and Black women were a stark contrast. When the discourse of discrimination based on sex is

referenced, it refers to White middle-class women, exclusive to issues that only affect that group (Ezaydi, 2023). This thought process disenfranchises Black women as their experiences are different based on the historical context of slavery.

However, the recent decision in the case of *EEOC v. Catastrophe Management Solutions* in 2016 proved that micromanagement of Black women's hair still exists almost 60 years after passing the Act. This decision reinforced previous decisions showing how Black women fall through the cracks on the interpretation of race and sex as bases for discrimination. EEOC brought a case against Catastrophe Management Solutions when the company rescinded an employment offer in accordance with their neutral grooming policy when the perspective employee would not cut her dreadlocks (Powell, 2019). This decision did two things. First, the decision enforced that Black women's hair can be micromanaged in the workplace. Two, the grooming policy served as a catalyst of undue burden on Black women and allowed the disparate impact and disparate treatment of Black women (Powell, 2019).

Despite federal courts not moving forward to pass laws that address these protections, states are taking up the slack to right a wrong. California first passed the Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural (CROWN) Hair Act on July 3, 2019. However, the coalition partners of the CROWN Act have evolved in their efforts to ensure the eradication of race-based discrimination, thus updating the CROWN Act to Creating a Respectful and Open World with No Racism. This Act was passed to protect against discrimination based on hairstyles by extending statutory protection to hair texture and protective styles in the Fair Employment and Housing Act (FEHA) and state Education Codes (thecrownact.com). Other states that have passed the CROWN Act

include New York, New Jersey, Montgomery County, Maryland, Cincinnati, Ohio, and Virginia. Twenty-three states have passed the CROWN Act with 27 to go.

The CROWN research conducted by Dove (2019) showed that workplace discrimination based on hair is real. Dove investigated the magnitude of discrimination against Black women who wore their hair in its natural state. The study confirmed that workplace bias against Black women who wear their hair in its natural state impacts their ability to celebrate their natural beauty. The 2019 CROWN research revealed that Black women are:

- 1.5x more likely to be sent home from work because of their hair
- 3.5% more likely to be perceived as 'unprofessional' because of their hair
- 30% more likely to be made aware of a formal workplace appearance policy
- 80% more likely to change their natural hair to meet social norms or expectations at work
- 83% more likely to report being judged more harshly on their looks than other women

In 2023, Dove and LinkedIn co-commissioned a study that examined the impact of hair bias on Black women in the workplace, detailing the systemic financial and social impact. The research findings showed there is a systemic problem in the workplace ranging from, but not limited to, hiring practices, daily work interactions, employment opportunities, and professional development. The 2023 CROWN workplace research revealed the following:

- Black women's hair is 2.5x more likely to be perceived as unprofessional.

- Approximately 2/3 of Black women (66%) change their hair for a job interview. Among them, 41% changed their hair from curly to straight.

- Black women are 54% more likely (or over 1.5x more likely) to feel like they have to wear their hair straight to a job interview to be successful.

- Black women with coily/textured hair are 2x as likely to experience microaggressions in the workplace than Black women with straighter hair.

- Over 20% of Black women aged 25-34 have been sent home from work because of their hair.

- Nearly half (44%) of Black women under age 34 feel pressured to have a headshot with straight hair.

- 25% of Black women believe they have been denied a job interview because of their hair, which is even higher for women under 34 (1/3).

Problem Statement

Black women want to wear their hair in its natural state in the workplace, but employers want to have a say in how they wear their hair. States have taken matters into their own hands, passing laws to protect Black women in the workplace. However, there are no federal laws. This poses a problem for many Black women in the federal government, as it is considered the largest and model employer in the U.S. This problem is a social issue.

Federal courts have missed the mark in analyzing Black women's issues by using a single lens. Black women take up several identities, which should be analyzed with a holistic approach. Failure to change the perceptions of policy and lawmakers will continue to disenfranchise and marginalize Black women. The *Dove* (2019) study showed

three key findings: Black women (1) are more policed in the workplace, (2) feel their hair is targeted, and (3) are constantly rated as less ready for job performance. However, gaps remain, as the federal government has yet to address this issue, and data is lacking specifically on Black women's hair in the federal workplace.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this narrative study was to understand the impact of Black women in the federal government choosing to wear their hair in its natural textured state on their career advancement.

Research Question

What are Black women's experiences when they choose to wear their hair in its natural state as they seek career advancement in the federal government?

Significance of the Study

The inability of Black women to reach their promotion potential may be a reason for retirement and a barrier to maintaining the quality of life that all Americans deserve based on a human rights perspective. The EEOC requires all federal agencies to complete a diversity report, Management Directive 715, that shows a snapshot of agencies at the end of each fiscal year, capturing empirical data categorized by positions, grades, promotions, gender, race, and disability. Agencies must also indicate how they plan to address any barriers in the report. Despite these efforts, agencies are not getting to the root of the problem. These are "surfaces studies." Although it is a start, more analyses and probing questions should be addressed.

To analyze the root causes of issues affecting Black women and their ability to express their authentic selves through their natural hair, the dominant group cannot speak

for them but include them in understanding their issues. This research addresses the root factors that may impact Black women's growth, promotion, and economic sustainability in the federal workforce.

More importantly, the findings from this study will provide relevant information that can assist federal agencies identify and mitigate areas of conflicts regarding Black women expressing their cultural identity.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this research was structured on two key theories: structural violence and intersectionality. To fully understand the historical context and experiences of Black women and their positionality in the workplace, critical race theory (CRT), critical feminist theory, and Black feminist thought will lend substance to intersectionality. Intersectionality emerged from Black feminist theory based on the lived experiences of Black women. It is important to illustrate how the integration of critical race theory (CRT), critical feminist theory, and Black feminist thought interconnect with the intersections of Black women. These theories serve as precursors to intersectionality, which will be discussed in Chapter Two.

Definition of Terms

Howard University Associate Professor Greg Carr explained that "despite the dictionary definitions, there's no term that truly describes people that were taken from Africa and sold into slavery" (Quander & Froneberger, p. 1). Many use the terms African American and Black interchangeably, as the experience is the same, but the trauma may be different.

- **African American**: Mayes explained African Americans as descendants of slaves whose origins began on the continent of Africa and have a history on the American continent (Broaddus, 2019).

- **Black women/men:** Black individuals are those whose parents come from other parts of the world and may not identify as African American (Broaddus, 2019). However, they may identify as Black, which often describes race (2020).

- **Diversity**: "The practice of including the many communities, identities, races, ethnicities, backgrounds, abilities, cultures, and beliefs of the American people, including underserved communities" (White House Executive Order 14035, 2021, p. 1).

- **Equity**: "The consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals, including individuals who belong to underserved communities that have been denied such treatment" (White House Executive Order 14035, 2021, p. 1).

- **Eurocentric Beauty Standards**: Standards based on appearance set by the dominant group. Tranchina (2015) describes it as a "focus on European or Caucasian culture" (p. 1).

- **Explicit Bias**: "negative attitudes and beliefs we have about a racial group, deliberately formed on a conscious level" (Johnson et al., p. 1).

- **Implicit Bias**: "embedded negative stereotypes our brains automatically associate with a particular group of people" (Johnson et al., p. 1).

- **Inclusion**: "The recognition, appreciation, and use of the talents and skills of employees of all backgrounds" (White House Executive Order 14035, 2021, p. 1).

- **Microaggression**: Brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative prejudicial slights and insults toward any group, particularly culturally marginalized groups (Tyson, 2015).

- **Natural or textured hair:** Black women's hair that is not processed or straightened but left in its original state. Some people call this relaxer-free, chemical-free, or perm-free (Days, n.d.).

- **Institutionalized Racism**: Incorporation of racists policies in the institutions by which society operates (Tyson, 2015, p. 345).

- **Racism**: "Any program or practice discrimination, segregation, persecution, or mistreatment based on membership in a race or ethnic group" (Delgago & Stefancic, 2017, p. 183).

- **Respectability Politics**: According to Dazey (2020), "Respectability politics is the process by which privileged members of marginalized groups comply with dominant social norms to advance their group's condition" (p. 1).

- **Structural Racism**: According to Lander (2021), "Structural racism refers to wider political and social disadvantages within society, such as higher rates of poverty for Black and Pakistani groups or high rates of death from COVID-19 among people of color" (p. 2).

- **Systemic Racism**: Policies or practices that are entrenched in established institutions that exclude or fail to promote marginalized groups (Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre, n.d.).

Context of the Researcher

Growing up, I was always told that education is the gateway out of poverty and a path to economic growth. The belief was if you learned your craft and worked hard, you would be noted for your character, merits, and what you brought to a company. However, as a Black woman, expressing my authentic self in the workplace can be challenging—specifically, how I choose to wear my hair. Twenty-two years ago, I decided to wear my hair in its natural textured state. With this decision, I ceased using chemicals that straightened my hair. This was a liberating experience for me. It was not without careful thought. I vacillated for one year after the birth of my last child. I experienced anxiety as I wondered how my family, friends, church community, and co-workers would react as I began this journey. It was not an easy decision.

Growing up, my classmates and I would always describe other classmates by mentioning their 'good hair.' We used the term from elementary through high school. We would say, "You know the girl with the good hair." Little did we know we were internalizing Eurocentric aesthetic images as positive images and our tightly coiled hair as negative images. Attending a historically black college and university (HBCU), I began to see people who looked like me in normal settings. They were no longer anomalies. I remember one of my high school teachers questioning my decision to select an HBCU instead of a predominately white institution (PWI). In several advanced

placement courses, I was one of two Black students in the class. I wanted to see others who looked like me.

My inspiration grew to wear my hair in its natural state from talking to other Black women who had transitioned to wearing natural hairstyles. They allowed me to ask them open and honest questions and provided open and honest responses. I asked questions ranging from their decision to go natural to hair care maintenance. As exhilarating and therapeutic as it was for me to speak with these women, I believe it was also therapy for them.

The biggest challenge has been in the workplace. I remember going for an interview at my federal agency. The interview went well, but I was not offered the position. I remember a Black male colleague coming up to me saying he believed I did not get the job because I wore an afro. That incident occurred about eleven years ago, but it continues to resonate with me. It made me ask the question: do Black women have to adhere to Eurocentric standards to be accepted and promoted in the workplace, and why is the Black woman's hair micro-managed?

Sometimes, I decide to use heat on my hair because I am in the mood to wear a particular style. But again, this is my choice. As I told my hairstylist about my natural hair journey, she reminded me of the times I called her at the last minute, informing her that I had a job interview and needed to straighten my hair. Was I unconsciously trying to assimilate Eurocentric standards to fit in, resulting in the engagement of respectability politics?

On the other hand, while vacationing in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, I saw several shops on the main strip offering to cornrow hair, and the clients were White. Does

that make it right now that White women want their hair styled in this manner? This situation generates complex issues. Not only does appropriateness come from other groups who have European features, but there are complexities within the Black race regarding hair. There are no clear answers. However, this topic is relevant to me as a federal employee with aspirations of advancing my federal career. If I feel that I cannot be my authentic self, then my unique perspectives, recommendations, suggestions, and solutions may not be valued by others. Mimicking others to ease their comfort level is not an option from my standpoint as a Black woman.

I patronize a white establishment where I get my nails done, and my hair is always the center of discussion every time I set foot there. Since it also serves as a hair salon, I receive numerous requests from stylists in the salon asking if they can touch my hair and how I do certain hairstyles. The only reason I still patronize the business is because I am pleased with the services of the nail technician, who is Vietnamese. When we are the only people in the salon, I feel relieved because I know I do not have to be subjected to initial stares and questions when I walk into the salon. It becomes extremely exhausting, to the extent that I strategically schedule my appointments to a time when I know some stylists are not working.

I see constant reminders that microaggression are not new. I have experienced these types of slights all my life. I was new in my career and did not know how to respond, but I knew how the slights made me feel. Now, there is a name for it.

Summary

This research study postulates a robust understanding of the natural hair experience of Black women in the federal government, specifically as it relates to

structural violence and intersectionality. Chapter One presented the background of Black women in the federal government, the research question, and the theoretical framework that described the need for the study. The structural violence and intersectionality theories facilitated an understanding of this group's experiences.

Chapter Two provides a more detailed review of existing literature regarding the experiences of Black women with natural textured hair in the federal government as they advance their careers. In addition, Chapter Two provides historical context on the intersection between race and gender as well as the understanding of critical race theory, critical feminist theory, and Black feminism thought and how they inform the identity of Black women.

Chapter Three elucidates the methodology used to analyze this research topic. Chapter Four examines the study's findings, and Chapter Five provides a robust discussion of the findings, implications for practice, and recommendations for further research in the field.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Intersectionality draws attention to invisibilities that exist in feminism, in antiracism, in class politics, so, obviously, it takes a lot of work to consistently challenge ourselves to be attentive to aspects of power that we don't ourselves experience.

– Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw

Theoretical Framework

The killing of Mr. George Floyd pin-pointed and amplified the racial tensions and issues that Black communities in the United States have been experiencing and conveying for decades. One issue that lingered is the exclusion of the culture and history of Black Americans as part of American history; not until the late 1960s did the Black American diaspora begin to appear in official versions of American history (Tyson, 2015). Albeit, this was the history that only White Americans wanted to be conveyed. From a historical perspective and by all stereotypical accounts, the image depicted was that slaves were dumb and grateful for the guidance of the White masters; otherwise, if left to their own devices, they would be lost or become dangerous savages.

The perceptions about race have evolved; race is a social construct and not attributed to biological traits. Tyson (2015) made a distinction between racialism and racism. Racialism is the belief in racial superiority, inferiority, and purity based on the conviction that moral and intellectual characteristics, like physical characteristics, are biological properties that differentiate the races. Tyson explained further that "racism refers to the unequal power relations that grow from the sociopolitical domination of one

race by another and that result in systemic discriminatory practices" (p. 344). Anyone can be a racialist, but to be a racist, one must be in a position of power to discriminate, persecute, or segregate.

Structural Violence

Johan Galtung introduced structural violence in his *Violence, Peace, and Peace* research in 1969. Galtung (1969) began with three principles: (1) there is a verbal understanding the term 'peace' is used for social goals; (2) the complexity of the social goals does not mean they are not attainable; and (3) the assertion that "peace is the absence of violence" is valid. In an interview with Amy Goodman of *Democracy Now*, Galtung further explained the distinction between negative and positive peace. Positive peace involves equity and harmony. Equity is the cooperation for mutual and equal benefit. Harmony is attitudinal. Therefore, positive peace comes with the absence of structural and cultural violence (Network Diplomacy, 2023). For example, we suffer when others are suffering, and we enjoy the joy of others. Negative peace is trauma and unresolved conflict. Trauma refers to violence from the past. Network Diplomacy (2023), explains Galtung's characteristics of negative peace:

1. **Absence of physical violence**: There is no armed conflict, war, or physical violence taking place. This means that individuals and communities are not experiencing harm or injury as a result of violence.
2. **Stability**: There is a general sense of stability and security in the society, and individuals and communities are able to go about their daily lives without fear of violence.
3. **Access to basic needs:** Individuals and communities have access to basic needs such as food, shelter, and healthcare.
4. **Law and order:** There is a functioning legal system and institutions in place to maintain law and order.

5. **Economic development:** The society is able to promote economic development and social mobility.

6. **Protection of human rights:** The rights of individuals and communities are protected, including the right to live free from violence and discrimination.

7. **Security:** There is a sense of security for individuals and communities, and they are able to go about their daily lives without fear of violence.

Looking at these characteristics, one may think needs are being met. However, peace with the absence of direct violence is not enough. Although circumstances may appear better because there is no physical or direct violence, positive peace is not fully achieved (Gultang, 2012).

Society must address the structural violence and cultural violence of negative peace even when physical violence is absent. Galtung explained that reconciliation is the only way to eliminate this negative peace (Galtung, 2012). Structural violence manifest where economic, social, and political ecosystems continually promote inequality and oppression (Network Diplomacy, 2023). Cultural violence provides the social norms and tenants that society uses to legitimize structural violence (Network Diplomacy, 2023).

Galtung (1969) explained that describing *violence* is not as simple as describing *peace*, as there are many types of violence. The definition of violence must be broad enough to capture the complexities of the many types of violence and narrow enough to establish an origin of action. Galtung asserted, "Violence is present when human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realizations" (p. 186). The keywords in this statement are actual and potential. Galtung defined violence as the difference between the potential and actual. The difference is the gap. As the gap increases, it suggests some barriers impede the closing of the distance. As the distance increases, violence increases.

Galtung (1969) further explained how one discusses violence where there is no direct actor committing the violence. This is called structural or indirect violence. Violence is entrenched in the structure and presents in the form of unequal power and life changes. Galtung stated that "Resources are evenly distributed and the power to decide distribution of resources is unevenly distributed" (p. 171). A recent example is an urban city that received funds to issue grants to small businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although several Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) businesses were located in the city, only a small fraction qualified for the grant or even knew the grant existed. This grant could have served as a lifeline for those businesses to keep their doors open. However, the lack of due diligence of those in power to equitably distribute those resources, illustrates the continuous structural violence. Although this was not an intentional targeted exclusion, it elucidates how those in power did not consider the perspectives and experiences of those groups in the city who have been historically marginalized. Gultang (1969) refers to this as social injustice.

Galtung also cited the example of people dying from tuberculosis. Back in the eighteenth century, it was understandable that people were dying because medicine had not advanced at the level of treating or eradicating the disease. Therefore, it would not be considered violence because it may have been unavoidable. However, when people die today, despite all the available resources and advancements in modern medicine in the world surrounding this disease, violence is present (Galtung, 1969). Galtung stated, "When the potential is higher than the actual is by definition avoidable, and when it is avoidable, then violence is present" (p. 169). There is negative peace when the basic human needs of populations are not met. For example, low-income residents may have

higher mortality rates because they do not have access to healthcare. A real-time present-day event is the COVID-19 pandemic. This pandemic is showing a distinct line between the haves and have-nots. This national emergency has disproportionally affected Blacks as it relates to cases and deaths within most of the fifty states and Washington, D.C. (Godoy, 2020), ranging from healthcare to economic sustainability.

Galtung's (1969) theory of structural violence is appropriate in examining the conflicts and barriers that Black women face in expressing their cultural identity by wearing their hair in its natural state because of policies and laws that affect a marginalized group. Federal law states that legally, the only natural hairstyle that Black women can wear in the workplace is the afro (Powell, 2019). The violence is present as the gap widens between the actual and potential, resulting in Black women not advancing careers, which explains a disparity in the wage gap and economic sustainability.

Another factor to consider is the actual somatic violence on Black women's hair. Gultang's theory on violence can be analyzed with a multidimensional approach. In their quest for "beautiful" hair, there is physical violence that Black women endure by using chemicals on their hair that burn their scalps. Secondly, eliminating their hair texture is an erasure of culture (Oyedemi, 2016). A study conducted at a rural African university with a predominately Black student population showed that violence was an integral factor in Black women's relationship with their hair (Oyedemi, 2016).

Some women choose to wear their hair in its natural textured state. In a study by Pilane (2015), a woman explains what it feels like to have her hair done by her hairdresser:

Many other hairdressers. . . want to know why I make their job hard. Why don't I just chemically straighten my hair? If I could, I would rather lash out at . . . all the other hairdressers who make it a point to tell me that my hair, the way it comes out of my scalp, is a nuisance. I have to listen to the women I have entrusted with my hair, shaming it for the next six or so hours. (p. 39)

To provide the historical context of the violation of hair in South Africa, the racist policies of apartheid South Africa determined class, social hierarchy, and economic survival based on skin and the texture of an individual's hair (Oyedemi, 2016). The Population Registration Act of 1950 placed South Africans in four categories by race (Whites, Asians/Indians, Coloureds, and Natives or Blacks). Categories were based on physical traits, which determined where a person was born, lived, went to school, died, and was buried (Oyedemi, 2016). If making distinctions were not obvious, the pencil test was conducted. If the pencil was inserted in the hair and it fell to the floor, one was considered White. If the pencil remained in the hair, one was considered Coloured. Even though a person was Coloured, it was better than being classified as Black (Powe, 2009). The implications of this marginalized act led to psychological and cultural violence. To counteract the marginalization, some women strategically used chemicals to straighten their hair, erasing their identity. Black women's journey to attain 'beautiful' hair, as considered appropriate by Eurocentric standards, is a catalyst for structural violence (Oyedemi, 2016).

Disparaging descriptions were not only found in South Africa. Hair testing practice was common in other regions, such as Brazil and the Caribbean (Alleyne,

2002). The United States was not an exception. It used the practice of the "comb test" (Byrd & Thorpe, 2001). Morrow (1974) described how Africans were brought to North America during the Transatlantic slave trade. As captives, they did not have the luxury of bringing their hairstyling apparatus, causing their hair to become tangled and mangled. The various complexions of slaves were due to slave rape on plantations. The offspring of slaves usually had lighter complexions and hair texture closer to their European parent, resulting in plantations having slaves with other typical African features (Oyedemi, 2016). Freed slaves with lighter complexions used the 'comb test' to test the coarseness of hair, differentiating them from darker-skinned former slaves with kinky hair (Byrd & Tharps, 2021).

When slaves were freed in the United States, freedom had different meanings. The Reconstruction period gave former slaves hope that they would be afforded the same opportunities as Whites. Those rights, hopes, and dreams seemed attainable as Congress passed the 1866 and 1875 Civil Rights Act, intending to grant basic civil rights to African American men, along with property and voting rights (Birkland, 2016). These civil rights laws also afforded African-Americans equal access to public accommodations, such as schools and railroad cars (Birkland, 2016). This was short-lived after the election of President Rutherford B. Hayes in 1876. Once Hayes became President, all efforts to enforce the civil rights laws ceased, leading the way for the South to engage in policies of segregation known as Jim Crow laws (Birkland, 2016).

Blacks who were able to prosper during this time were encouraged to maintain a low profile and tread lightly around Whites so as to not provoke their jealousy and anger (Byrd & Tharps, 2001). It was such that "Anything that a Black person had or did in excess was subject to the White majority's intense scrutiny" (Byrd & Tharps, 2001, p. 20). The White majority's scrutiny proved more intense with hair. For example, during the post-Civil War, it was fashionable for White men to wear their hair long and grow beards. When Black men grew their hair longer and stopped shaving, they were considered uppity and wild (Byrd & Tharps, 2001). However, when Black women wore their hair long and in prim and proper styles, they were considered well-adjusted by White society standards (Byrd & Tharps, 2001).

To further illustrate the violence endured by Black women, a study was conducted to review modern hairstyle trends that provided associated risk for the purpose and recommendations to dermatologists. Modern hairstyle trends included chemically relaxed hair, Brazilian keratin treatment (straightening treatment), braids, weaves, wigs, locs, twists, and natural hair (Asbeck et al., 2022). Natural hairstyle refers to styles not processed or straightened (Days, n.d.). Asbeck et al. (2022) found natural hairstyles showed no signs of physical risks; however, there were signs of psychological damage, discrimination, and frustration with styling natural hair. This has led many Black women to purchase and use products to achieve "good" hair.

Zota and Shamasunder (2017) estimated that the beauty industry generates $400 billion dollars globally, with African American consumers purchasing nine

times more ethnic products than any other group. To provide context, beginning at an early age, girls take on the burden of "good" (straighter/longer) and "bad" (tightly coiled/kinky) to place value on their hair. As with the cliché, appearance is the first thing people notice about each other. The African American woman context can be attributed to images advertising whiteness. The images factor into the hair products women select to achieve their desired look. Additionally, these perceptions lend to internalized racism.

As of 2022, the global beauty industry was worth $511 billion (Djurovic, 2021). In a study looking at plausible risk factors for health disparities among racially diverse populations, James-Todd et al. (2012) found that African American and African Caribbean women were more likely to use products that contained placenta, estrogen, and endocrine-disrupting chemicals (EDCs) that are associated with hormone-sensitive diseases, such as aggressive breast cancer. Overall, African American women used more of these products (49.4%) than African Caribbean women (26.4%) and White women (7.7%) (James-Todd et al., 2012). This literature is relevant to this research as it illustrates violence on women's health in obtaining a Eurocentric look that is pleasing to a majority group.

To illustrate how stress and anxiety play into the structural violence of hair, in 2014, the Pentagon issued Army Regulation 670-1, which banned hairstyles that African American women wore traditionally, such as twists, locs, and braids, demonstrating its acceptance of Eurocentric hairstyles that promoted using chemicals to change hair texture to enhance hair straightening (James-Todd

& Fitzgerald, 2014). After much backlash and accusations of racial bias from the medical field, the policy went under review. In January 2021, the military updated its policy to include representation that looks like the military. Grooming policies have been a concern across the military branches as they relate to the identity, presentation, and health of those serving (Ore, 2021). A new grooming policy shows how the military has evolved. However, there is a gap in the literature regarding the federal government. There are no federal laws to protect the identity, culture, and health of Black female civil servants. Congresswoman Barbara Lee addressed Congress in her support of H.R. 2116, the CROWN Act, with the following words:

> Just listen to what you're saying in terms of arguing against this bill. For decades, Black and brown people have been penalized for wearing hairstyles, natural hairstyles deemed as messy, unruly, unprofessional. We've seen students humiliated and unfairly disciplined because their braided hair extensions or locs were considered a violation of the dress code. In the workplace, Black people with braids, twists, locs, or no hair are often perceived as less professional than people with straightened hair which negatively impacts their ability to get promoted or get raises.

Congresswoman Marcia Fudge stated:

> It is disheartening that, in 2019, hair discrimination creates additional barriers for people of color in education and places of employment. Traditional hairstyles worn by African Americans are often necessary to meet our unique needs, and are a representation of our culture and ethnicity.

To require anyone to change their natural appearance to acquire educational resources or a job is undeniably an infringement on their civil rights. I'm proud to be a cosponsor of the House companion of the C.R.O.W.N. Act which protects against discrimination based on hair in federally funded institutions and in the workplace.

Senator Cory Booker asserted:

Discrimination against black hair is discrimination against black people. Implicit and explicit biases against natural hair are deeply ingrained in workplace norms and society at large. This is a violation of our civil rights, and it happens every day for black people across the country. …No one should be harassed, punished, or fired for the beautiful hairstyles that are true to themselves and their cultural heritage.

Some Black women choose to endure the violence on their hair to be accepted in mainstream America. This is an example of respectability politics. According to Dazey (2020), "Respectability politics is the process by which privilege members of marginalized groups comply with dominant social norms to advance their group's condition" (p. 1). Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham first coined this term when she studied the women's movement in the Black Baptist church between 1900 and 1920. Higginbotham first termed it "politics of respectability." This concept allowed Black Baptist women to counter those stereotypes and behaviors they believed were negative, resulting in assimilationist behaviors of Blacks to the dominant group's norms (Higginbotham, 1993).

While the Black women of the Baptist church had good intentions to uplift

their own race, there were also unintended consequences. First, respectability

politics give the illusion that it is only intended for the privileged few (Dazey

2020). Second, social inequalities are held private as opposed to out in the open

and psychologized, making those in the marginalized group responsible for their

own difficulties (Dazey, 2020). Third, respectability politics makes a group that is

already marginalized passive, docile, and politically resistant (Dazey, 2020).

The Road of Intersectionality

The lived experiences of Black women are multi-layered and complex due to their

history in the world. One cannot simply explain intersectionality without citing other

works and scholars that lend to the intersections of the identities and culture of Black

women. To add context to intersectionality, the researcher provides critical race theory

(CRT), critical feminist theory (CFT), and Black feminist thought (BFT), which

contributed to the development of intersectionality.

Critical Race Theory. The passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 included race

as a protected basis. Some believe racism no longer exists, especially when Barack

Obama was elected as the first African American President of the United States in 2007.

Racism still exists and presents itself in different forms. Some instances may include

denying Blacks job opportunities despite being more qualified than White applicants or

being denied mortgages or other loans. Despite constitutional laws that set out to protect

minorities, people of color still experience everyday racism. As Tyson (2015) stated,

"Everyday racism is a common, ordinary experience for people of color in the United

States" (p. 352). In other words, everyday racism strips ethnic minorities of their dignity

and humanity by violating their civil rights by small subtleties or big infractions on a day-to-day basis (Bell & Nkomo, 2001).

Civil rights laws were made to guarantee the rights of Black Americans. However, these rights have not always protected Black women. Scholar, civil rights attorney, and professor, Derrick A. Bell, Jr., initiated critical race theory (CRT) as he believed that the Civil Rights Movement failed to be the political and social force it once was (Tyson, 2015). It is much easier to identify overt racism and sexism in discourse as these are rare, which can be identified and categorized under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. However, what is hard to identify are those subtleties and microaggressions that Black women are faced with daily. A group of scholars explained this phenomenon as follows:

> The chief vehicle for proracist behaviors are microaggressions. These are subtle, stunning, often automatic, and non-verbal exchanges which are 'put downs' of blacks by offenders. The offensive mechanisms used against blacks are often innocuous. The cumulative weight of their never-ending burden is the major ingredient in black-white interactions. (Pierce et al., 1978, p. 66)

Delgado and Stefancic (2017) defined CRT as a movement that transforms relations among race, racism, and power. The authors stated, "Racism is ordinary, not aberrational – "normal science," the usual way society does business, the common everyday experience of most people of color in this country" (p. 8). There are five major tenets of CRT: (1) counter-storytelling, (2) permanence of racism, (3) whiteness as a property, (4) critique of liberalism, and (5) interest convergence.

Counter-Storytelling allows the voices of people of color to be heard, detailing their experiences of racial marginalization (Pitts, 2021). As legal scholars, Derrick Bell and Patricia Williams draw on the history and narrative of slaves and their conditions, unmasking the polite, gentle treatment of White slave owners purported to society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

Permanence of racism states that racism intersects with social, economic, and political sectors of American law, White people, and Black people (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Scholars of CRT argue that racism is embedded in all institutions and systems that manifest intentionally and unintentionally.

Whiteness as property indicates that only White people hold "the right of possession, the right to use and enjoyment, the right to disposition, and the right of exclusion (Hilrado, 2010, p. 55). Freedom is intangible. CRT acts under the auspices that property is a "right" as opposed to a "thing." Opportunity and access are afforded to White people and are excluded from or limited for people of color.

Critique of liberalism addresses color blindness and race neutrality in laws. These race-neutral laws may have unintended or intended consequences, allowing racism in systems to continue, negatively impacting Black people. Racial disparities will continue to plague people of color as the impact of policies and laws on groups who have been historically marginalized are not addressed.

Interest convergence premise is that Black people can advance in the civil rights realm only when White people benefit legislatively (Pitts, 2021). It is based on the rationality that something must be of benefit to White people legislatively if it is going to help Black people (Pitt, 2021).

Critical race theory coincides with the defined problem of Black women in this study as discussed with structural violence. Federal laws do not go far enough, and legislators have completely missed the mark for over 50 years in understanding Black women and their culture. Therefore, states are passing laws that protect women in the workplace. A person from a dominant group cannot invalidate the experiences of Black women as they have not lived it.

Martin Luther King, Jr. (2004) stated, "Law and order exist for the purpose of establishing justice, and when they fail in this purpose, they become the dangerously structured dams that block the flow of social progress" (p. 14). Dr. King meant that social progress can be blocked by laws. Those laws can hinder citizens from achieving their full potential if their basic human needs are not met and cannot enjoy a sustainable quality of life. There is no justice if laws do not uplift humanity. Dr. King explains in his *Letter from Birmingham Jail* that everything Hitler did was legal in accordance with German law.

CRT is appropriate for this research as it allows Black women the opportunity to tell their stories and experiences that may counter the perspectives of the majority group. Black women understand that there is no smoking gun for covert racism. However, racism is still manifested in policies and laws. This can be seen in organizations' and schools' aesthetic policies. Even though institutions may consider their policies neutral, Black women will always feel marginalized because the impact of their policies on groups who have been historically marginalized has not been carefully considered. If impacts are not considered, institutions serve as the oppressors. A federal law may not benefit those who do not have hair texture similar to that of Black women. However, it

may be in the best interest of elected officials to pass legislation. Not doing so will portray that the federal government is not open to diversity and equity.

      Critical Feminist Theory. Critical feminist theory culminated from feminist theories and critical theories. Feminist theories explore women's roles in history, views, interests, experiences, and social roles to value women's life and illuminate the exposure to gender inequality (Wood, 2015). Feminist theorist Judith Butler (1990) suggested that gender plays out in everyday life, for example, dominating a conversation or commanding center stage in interactions.

      Another concept is that of "patriarchy." Patriarchy expresses the interests, perspectives, and experiences of men. In many parts of the world, including the West, many societies were established by White heterosexual men who relied on their interests and needs. As a result, societies are not set up to reflect women's and minorities' experiences (Wood, 2015).

      Critical theorists are concerned with social change. They analyze those structures and practices that create or elevate the disadvantage, oppression, or inequity and look at alternatives to promote more equitable societies (Wood, 2015). Additionally, critical theorists are particularly interested in analyzing how dominant groups use their privileged interests and structured societies to ensure those interests are met.

      Critical theorists also examine the ideologies of groups to understand their reality. They illustrate how ideologies define the parameters of the struggle between dominant and non-dominant races, not limited to class systems, sexual orientation, and race, looking at how power is distributed and resisted (Wood, 2015). In addressing power, critical theorists examine formal power, such as law, and informal power as it relates to

everyday practices (Foucault, 1984). Critical theorists can study how marginalized groups can disrupt, dismantle, and write a different narrative that reflects their interests and perspectives that are inclusive to those that encompass it.

The intersection of feminist and critical theories encompasses those theories that identify, critique, and seek to change the inequities and discrimination based on gender and sex (Dow & Wood, 2006). Critical feminist theories look at how women become empowered and how they change the ideologies of the practices that constrain women's lives (Wood, 2015). There are two main foci of analysis of critical feminist theories: power and women's experiences, perspectives, and knowledge.

According to Braithwaite and Schrodt (2015), "Critical Feminist theories focus keenly on power relations and linked issues such as the unequal status and privilege accorded to women compared to that accorded to men" (p. 208). Men hold most positions of power, and because of this, critical feminist theorists argue that the experiences of women, perspectives, and knowledge are devalued and voices suppressed (Wood, 2015). Because of the devaluation and suppression, critical feminist theories aim to raise awareness of women's experiences, perspectives, and knowledge.

Communication is a key factor in understanding critical feminist theories. Wood (2015) asserted that communication creates identities, relationships, and cultures representing experiences. Communication is a means to convey and understand experiences via "language" and "voice." Critical feminist theories offer a point of departure for communication. Wood further stated, "First, communication is understood as a means of enacting power relations between people. Second, communication is a way to name phenomena and thereby phenomena subject to notice, reference, and

negotiation" (p. 209). If the phenomenon of Black hair is not named, it is less likely to be acknowledged, noticed, or valued, leaving little or no room to challenge and negotiate.

Examining the Dobbs v. Jackson decision that overturned Roe v. Wade, provides a real-time example of empowerment. The majority consisted of five men and one woman to overturn the important law. The patriarchy of this historic decision is mainly through the perspectives and ideologies of men sitting on the high court. The right for women to have agency of their bodies is at stake. Critical theorists convey the paradigm of social change to find alternatives to leverage inclusivity on the societal level. The intersection of feminist and critical theories empowers women to change the inequities that will place constraints on how they make decisions about their bodies.

Critical feminist theory serves as a precursor to intersectionality and lends to this research, elucidating on the previously discussed foci. Black women have been marginalized in the United States since slavery. Hence, women, regardless of race, disproportionally hold leadership positions compared to White men. If White women are experiencing these problems, Black women's experiences are exponential. When it comes to Black women and natural hair in the workplace, critical feminist theory can provide a voice for Black women to name their experiences and perspectives and step further by challenging the inequalities they communicate. Understanding and articulating challenges Black women face is to look through the lens of the Black feminist theory, starting from slavery to the modern contemporary United States. White women cannot relate as their focus is not on Black women because they have not experienced hair discrimination. White women cannot be social activists if they do not understand or have

not experienced this type of rejection. Just as white male heterosexuals constructed their laws and policies on their ideologies, white women have done the same.

Black Feminist Thought. Black feminist thought explores ideas of Black American intellectual scholars, such as bell hooks, Audre Lorde, Patricia Hill Collins, and Alice Walker, regarding the marginalization of Black women on how they are left out of literature and elucidating how knowledge plays an important role in empowering a group of marginalized people. Collins (1986) identified three themes of Black feminist thought. First, Black women produce Black feminist thought. In other words, one cannot separate the structure or historical content. Second, Black women share certain links as a group due to their unique experiences. Finally, for Black women to understand Black feminist standpoints, it is up to the intellectuals to produce theories that help Black women understand their own standpoints. Black feminist thought compliments the stories of this study's participants.

Collins (1990) stressed the importance of knowledge in galvanizing marginalized groups and just as important in domination and resistance. According to Collins (1990, as cited in Lemert, 2017), "Dominant groups aim to replace subjugated knowledge with their own specialized thought because they realize gaining control over this dimension of subordinate groups' lives simplifies control" (p. 416). In Collins' *Matrix of Domination,* she showed how the oppressed group holds on to Eurocentric beauty standards imposed by the dominant group. Collins further explained that because of these standards, Black women have a complex with their skin color and hair texture. In obtaining the narrative of Black women in the workplace, this level of dominance may be validated, as well as

any resistance mechanisms that Black women utilize to arrive at work in their authentic selves.

Black women needed to shape feminist theory unique to them based on their experiences of rejection and alienation. Before the realization of contemporary scholars to identify the distinction in women's lives, Rich (1978) described "white solipsism—to think, imagine, and speak as if whiteness described the world" (p. 299). History has shown how Black women have struggled with White women on various political fronts. To begin the discussion of these fronts, it is important to start the waves of feminism in its historical context.

Two waves in history mark feminism. The two waves emerged due to the struggles of Black women for freedom and racial equality. It is also important to know that Black women also initiated these struggles. Lee (1992) illustrated how the first wave emerged between 1830 and the 1860s, explaining how Black women became conscious of their unique experiences and those perspectives of sexism shared with White women. Sojourner Truth first called attention to the intersection of race and gender. In her recorded speech, "Ar'nt I a Women," Truth used theological justification for abolishing slavery and equal rights for both men and women (Taylor, 1998).

Once the Thirteenth Amendment was passed, the tension between the abolitionists and feminists boiled over into suffrage. It was Elizabeth Cady Stanton, a White feminist leader, who wrote several letters to Wendell Phillips related to the Fifteenth Amendment (Taylor, 1998). Dubois (1978) stated Stanton's question, "May I ask you just one question based on the apparent opposition in which you place the negro and the woman? My question is this: Do you believe the African race is composed entirely of males?" (p.

60). Stanton feared that Black men would receive legal suffrage before White women. As such, she only acknowledged the existence of Black women to save her constituency's franchise (Taylor, 1998). Stanton manipulated Black women to meet the needs of White women. In turn, this created a legacy of friction between Black and White women as Stanton's ploy did not fool Black women.

Despite the manipulation by White women in the suffrage movement, Black women never deserted the suffrage efforts. They continued to organize suffrage clubs and voter leagues. Ida B. Wells-Barnett and Mary Church Terrell were among the women at the forefront for voting rights. Wells-Barnett wrote, "The Negro has been given separate and inferior schools because he has no ballot" (Wells-Barnett, 1990, p. 269).

Despite the obstacles Black women faced, they continued to fight and never deserted the cause of suffrage. This led to the second wave, where the consciousness of Black women evolving became evident. This wave is linked to the Civil Rights Movement. Some recognize this wave by the Supreme Court Decision *Brown v Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*. Additionally, this was the period of the enforcement of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and Title VII and Title XI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. To achieve these major milestones for civil rights, Black women were at the forefront of the struggle for justice and equality. JoAnn Robinson was a major organizer of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, which catapulted Martin Luther King, Jr., as the leader in the non-violent movement. Then, Ella Baker, who served as the interim director of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), organized students in 1960, forming the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) (Taylor, 1998). SNCC's efforts facilitated the non-violent movement phase.

Despite the contributions of Black women, they often received little recognition.
Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have A Dream" speech was a pivotal moment in the
history of the Civil Rights Movement. However, Black women were not allowed to
participate directly in the March (Joseph, n.d.). During that time, National Council of
Negro Women members, Dorothy Height and Anna Arnold Hedgeman, expressed
concerns over the Black women's participation in the March. According to Height
(2001), "There was an all-consuming focus on race. We women were expected to put all
our energies into it [the March]… there was a low tolerance level for…questions about
women's participation" (p. 85). As the men walked down Pennsylvania Avenue to the
Lincoln Memorial, Dorothy Height, along with other Black females, held a parallel
march down Independence Avenue to bring attention to the oppression they faced
(Destagir, 2018). These women understood the duality of racism and sexism that needed
to be inclusive.

In 1974, a group of women, sisters Barbara and Beverly Smith, and Demita
Frazier, formed the Combahee River Collective (CRC), a name derived from Harriet
Tubman's raid on the Combahee fiery raid in South Caroline, where Tubman freed over
700 slaves (Taylor, 2017). They considered themselves a radial group and radical
alternative to the National Black Feminist Organization, which was formed to address
issues that white feminist organizations failed to respond to, such as racial issues
plaguing Black women (Taylor, 2017).

Before Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality, CRC introduced
"interlocking oppression" and "identity politics." However, "CRC did articulate the
analysis that animates the meaning of intersectionality, the idea that multiple oppressions

reinforce each other to create new categories of suffering" (Taylor, 2017, p. 8). The CRC was needed to understand the experiences of Black women in contrast to white women and Black men, as well as serving as a point of departure for Black women to enter politics (Taylor, 2017).

These women authored the Combahee River Collective Statement that sought to analyze the roots of Black women's oppression. The statement examined four topics: (1) Genesis of contemporary Black feminism; (2) what we believe about our politics; (3) the problems in organizing Black feminists; and (4) Black feminist issues and practice (Taylor, 2017). These experiences served as rites of passage for Black women, just as the stories of women in their hair journey. bell hooks wrote about the need not to be White but simply express the need to feel beautiful through hair (1989).

> We are girls. It is a desire of ours to be women. It is a gesture that says we are approaching womanhood. It is a rite of passage. It is a gesture that says we are approaching womanhood. It is a rite of passage. Before we reach the appropriate age we wear braids and plaits that are symbols of our innocence, our youth, our childhood. Then we are comforted by the parting hands that comb and braid, comforted by the intimacy and bliss. There is a deeper intimacy in the kitchen on Saturday when hair is pressed, when fish is fried, when sodas are passed around, when soul music drifts over the talk. We are women together. This is our ritual and our time. It is a time without men. It is a time when we work to meet each other's needs, to make each other beautiful in whatever way we can. It is a time of laughter and mellow talk. Sometimes it is an occasion for tears and sorrow. Mama

is angry, sick of it all, pulling the hair too tight, using too much grease, burning one ear and then the next. (Hooks, p. 382)

Before the Combahee River Collective and Kimberlé Crenshaw, there was Dr. Anna Julia Cooper (1859-1964). Dr. Cooper was one of the earliest voices to lend to the scholarship of intersectionality. Dr. Cooper asserted that because of Black women's unique experiences, they can contribute to society by their vast standpoints (National Park Service, n.d.). Cooper's essays and books are still relevant today. As a staunch supporter of human rights of Black women, her activism was overlooked during the women's suffrage movement. Cooper remained critical of women rights organization that support all women, but did nothing for their causes to address Black women and racism (National Park Service, n.d.).

Intersectionality. Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term "intersectionality" in her work *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics.* Here, Crenshaw (1989) explained that the experiences of Black women should not be analyzed through a single-axis lens, as it distorts their experiences. Crenshaw further elucidated the how antidiscrimination framework theoretically erases the experiences of Black women, in which she focused on three court decisions illustrating how the courts interpret the narratives of Black women under Title VII (Crenshaw, 1989). They include *DeGrafferied v General Motors, Moore v Hughes Helicopter, and Payne v Travenol.* Despite the different scenarios of these lawsuits, women's blackness served a detriment to how discrimination cases are analyzed. For those alleging an issues based on race, those racism issues tend to focus on the experiences of Black men. While those alleging

discrimination based on sex, focus on experiences of White women, leaving no latitude for Black women's experiences to be analyzed. "Because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated" (p. 140). Thus, the structure of analysis must be re-imagined, or we will continue to see the erasure of Black women's experiences and identities as if watching a movie scene in slow motion.

The courts failed to understand the claims of Black women, serving as a catalyst to marginalize this population (Crenshaw, 1989). Crenshaw further stated:

> Unable to grasp the importance of Black women's intersectional experiences, not only courts, but feminist and civil rights thinkers as well have treated Black women in ways that deny both the unique compoundedness of their situation and the centrality of their experiences to the larger classes of women and Blacks. Black women are regarded as either too much like women or Blacks and the compound nature of their experience is absorbed in to the collective experiences of either group or as too different, in which case Black women's Blackness or femaleness sometimes has placed their needs and perspectives as the margin of the feminist and Black liberationist agendas. (p. 150)

Intersectionality lends to this study as scholars posit that gender and race intersect with other social categories (Koval & Rosette, 2021). As Black women seek to preserve their identity in the workplace, they are often faced with how they present themselves in hiring and promotion. Choosing a hairstyle is a personal matter, but Black women have to

think beyond their personal choices and consider the consequences of their choices (Koval & Rosette, 2021). This is a matter of perception.

In 2016, SheaMoisture launched a "Break the Walls Campaign" to illuminate the perceptions of retailers and the beauty industry's perceptions of natural hair products when they segregate natural hair products from those that cater to straight hair by race (Johnson, 2017). In most stores, products that cater to straight hair were listed in the beauty aisle, and those related to natural hair products were in the "ethnic" aisle. Whether product placement is intentional or based on best practices, it sends a subliminal message that natural textured hair products are less attractive, inferior, and undesirable (Johnson, 2017). There is sufficient data that illustrates that there is harm linked to racial bias against Black women. The intersection of race, gender, and social class manifests through Black women's experiences and stories, which is carried over to the workplace climate where oppression continues (Moorosi et al., 2018). Black women face barriers and challenges based on their racialized gendered histories.

Race and gender are two distinct bases of discrimination. However, Black women's experiences are not independent of each other. Rosette et al. (2018) described intersectionality as two social categories passing simultaneously and meeting at a common point at its most theoretical system. It is multi-layered and creates distinct experiences of identities for groups and individuals.

There are gaps within this topic because the federal government has not addressed this issue. Laws remain on the books that disenfranchise Black people. There should be some collective collaboration on updating laws that address the needs of the times. Data is lacking specifically on this subject of Black hair in the federal workplace.

Chapter Summary

Understanding the dynamics of Black women in the federal workplace and listening to their stories provides depth on the intersection of race and gender. This chapter presented an overview of the existing literature and theoretical framework. It provided two main theories: structural violence and intersectionality. Chapter Two also provided context to intersectionality by introducing CRT, critical feminist theory, and Black feminist thought. Chapter Three provides a detailed description of the research methodology and rationale for understanding this research topic.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose.

– Zora Neale Hurston; Dust Track on a Road

The purpose of this narrative study was to understand the impact on the career advancement of Black women in the federal government who choose to wear their hair in its natural textured state. The study sought to answer the following question: What are Black women's experiences when they choose to wear their hair in its natural state as they seek career advancement in the federal government?

This chapter justifies the use of a qualitative methodology approach for this study. This chapter covers the following sections: design appropriateness, sampling, interview procedures, data collection, and data analysis, followed by a chapter summation and prelude to Chapter Four.

Research Method and Design Appropriateness

This study was designed to understand the experiences of how Black women navigate their federal careers while wearing their natural hair. While there is quantitative data on women in the workplace, there is limited data on women working in the federal government. Specifically, there is a scarcity of stories from this group in the federal government. Creswell (2018) stated, "Qualitative research begins with assumption and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (p. 8).

Unlike quantitative data, qualitative data allows for voices to be heard from groups that have been historically marginalized through oral discussion and dialogue

from different perspectives. Qualitative methodology is used as a follow-up to illustrate the linkages and attach the stories to the quantitative data (Creswell, 2018). Qualitative methodology allows the researcher to understand the context in which the participant addressed the phenomenon (Creswell, 2018). Additionally, it serves as a means for participants to become empowered and addresses the gap in the research (Creswell, 2018).

The researcher explored this phenomenon from an epistemological assumption as the key premise of the interpretive framework in understanding the varying social perspectives of the participants while simultaneously becoming a social actor in attempting to understand their realities. Epistemology answers questions related to understanding knowledge, how the researcher closes the gap between research and participant, and using stories and quotes to get as close to the participant as much as possible (Creswell, 2018). The researcher served as an instrument for data collection and ensured the participants were in their natural environment conducive for optimal participation in the research.

Researchers serve as the human instrument, using their own abilities in observing and listening to collect, analyze, and interpret data (Wa-Mbaleka, 2019). Wa-Mbaleka (2019) discussed areas in which the researcher must be cognizant as the research instruments. First, researchers must design their own instruments, their research questions, and determine how they will record data, and the means of evaluating data, etc. Researchers may decide to conduct studies because they have experience in the research topic or know of individuals who have experienced a problem (Wa-Mbaleka, 2019).

Next, the researcher must understand how their emotions affect data and vice versa. Third, emotions tend to illuminate vulnerabilities, which may emerge during interviews when the researcher and the participant engage in constructive dialogue (Wa-Mbaleka, 2019). The vulnerability aspect of the research needs to have a mitigation plan to ensure an ethical study.

Finally, the human factor of personal biases is no different in qualitative research (QLR). Wa-Mbaleka (2019) stated, "While quantitative research promotes the elimination of subjectivity, although not practically possible in the real world, QLR promotes embracing subjectivity" (p. 35).

Structural violence and intersectionality were the theories that guided this research. The theoretical framework provided a common link between structural violence and intersectionality, as it shed light on Black women being marginalized by laws and policies, resulting in the violence of not being able to reach maximum economic capacity and not having their issues analyzed using multiple intersections. To understand this phenomenon, the researcher determined the best approach was to obtain this knowledge through stories as told through narrative research methodology.

Narrative research methodology is an appropriate methodology for this study because it allows the phenomenon to be viewed through a particular lens (Clandinin & Connelley, 2000). According to Connelly & Clandinin (1990), "narrative research is the study of how humans experience the world" (p. 1). The researcher is looking for participants' realities. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), "As a method, it begins with the experiences as expressed in lived and told stories of individuals" (p. 67). Narrative research methodology captures experiences at many levels:

They do not merely describe what someone does in the world but what the world does to someone. They allow us to infer something about what it feels like to be in that story world. Narratives also recount those events that happen unwilled, unpredicted, and often unwished for by the actor, even if those very actors set the events in motion in the first place… Narratives do not merely refer to past experiences but create the experiences for their audiences. (Riessmann, 2008, p. 22)

This phenomenon is intriguing because, despite an abundance of Black hair products being sold by White companies, such as Dove, Revlon, and Pantene, the workplace has not embraced Black women's textured hair. The beauty industry sees economic gains. However, some businesses see this issue as a liability.

In analyzing the circumstances of possible barriers and conflicts associated with this phenomenon, appropriate interview questions were developed for this study. The problem was first identified in the introduction. In a logical sense, a researcher demonstrates methodological congruence by defining the problem, stating the purpose of the study, and developing subsequent questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study is relevant because it serves as a catalyst to changing workplace laws, policies, and training, and determining appropriate workplace practices of diversity and inclusion programs that address root causes of systemic and institutionalized racism, failure to accept cultural identities, and unconscious and conscious biases.

With narrative research methodology, there are a host of analyses that can be used. One of the most common methods of narrative analysis is thematic analysis. As with all narrative inquiry, the focus is on "what" is said, meaning the researcher is

analyzing the content. The researcher preferred a deeper understanding of what was said, how the narrative was communicated, and the structures of speech. The appropriate research analysis to gain an in-depth understanding of this phenomenon was structural analysis.

Structural analysis not only focuses on content but also on how the storytelling impacts the narrator's experience of the story (Reissman, 2008). At the forefront of structural analysis is the work of William Labov and Joshua Waletzky, who developed the narrative structure coding system model over fifty-five years ago. Labov brought the systematic study of social linguistics to the forefront when he studied the Black English vernacular spoken by youths in Harlem, New York and other inner cities. One of the main purposes of Labov's research was to challenge a deficit theory where educational psychologists deemed the vernacular language of Black children was inadequate learning and logical thinking (Reissman, 2008). His work included interviews conducted by Black researchers.

The appropriateness of this research is equidistant to Labov's research, as the researcher is attempting to gain an understanding of Black women's experiences who have been historically marginalized in how they believe the majority group may see them as inadequate for career advancement instead of evaluating these women based on merits. In this research study, the interviewer was Black.

Labov used narrative and clauses to break down sentence structure when analyzing transcripts. He kept longer narrative exchanges intact for analytic purposes (Reissman, 2008). He then applied the coding structure that he and Waletzky developed earlier.

Additionally, it is also appropriate to combine thematic analysis after using Labov's coding structure. Thematic analysis focus is exclusive to content (Riessman, 2008). The interpretations are then placed into categories or themes, allowing the researcher to keep the story intact (Reissman, 2008). Any disordered spoken vernacular is transformed to make it easily understandable (Reissman, 2008). Thematic analysis can help to provide meaning to the stories of storytellers that give insight on participants' social identities (Reissman, 2008). After using Labov's analysis to examine a deeper understanding of how experiences are told, thematic analysis is a suitable approach for researchers to determine perspectives and experiences of participants through interviews and to look for patterns to develop themes.

Sampling

In a narrative research methodology study, the researcher needs one or more individuals who are accessible and willing to provide information related to the issue being explored, distinctive for their accomplishments and ordinariness, or who shed light on a specific phenomenon or issue being explored (Creswell and Poth, 2018). There is no random sampling in qualitative research. All samples are purposefully selected.

Purposeful sampling is a sampling strategy where the researcher selects individuals to the study with a purpose that provides an understanding of the research problem and its phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Once initial participants were identified, snowball sampling was used to obtain more participants for this study, as it helped to identify participants who knew other participants of interest for information-rich data (Creswell & Poth, 2015). The researcher utilized contacts within the federal government, networking at conferences and reaching out to members of organizations

such as Blacks in Government and Federally Employed Women. Because of the enormity

of the federal government and referring to data previously mentioned regarding Black

women across the federal government, it was appropriate to sample at least one Black

woman from the fifteen cabinet-level agencies where possible.

Because the researcher resided in the Washington metropolitan area, contacting

potential participants was appropriate since this area is rich with federal employees.

Potential participants were accessible and willing to provide information-rich data related

to the phenomenon. The criteria for the women included length of federal service (three

or more years), wearing their hair in its natural state, and currently in grades GS-12 to

Senior Executive Service (SES). Women were given pseudonyms to protect their

identities and agencies and to ensure their identities were not attributed to a particular

agency. The 15 cabinet-level agencies include the following departments: Veterans

Affairs, Agriculture, Commerce, Defense, Treasury, Health and Human Services,

Housing and Urban Development, State, Justice, Interior, Transportation, Labor, Energy,

Education, and Homeland Security.

Instrumentation

The instrument used for this study contained thirteen open-ended questions as a

point of departure to begin the interview. The pre-screening questionnaire provided

background information on all participants, allowing the researcher to begin the interview

with questions designed to illuminate the conversation with rich descriptions of their

experiences. The researcher chose to not use leading questions or questions starting with

'why,' to avoid the appearance of the researcher as passing judgement on the participant.

Data Collection

For the recruitment process, participants were chosen from different educational backgrounds, ages, and occupations upon approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The researcher aimed to ensure ethical protections were in place for all persons involved in the study. Although the participants were not considered a high-risk group and the IRB submission was reviewed and exempted, it was imperative for the researcher to utilize the IRB process and standards to ensure participants were treated with respect and dignity throughout the process. (Appendix A). In narrative research methodology, the IRB requires the submission of a data sample and interview guide, including detailed documents, such as the recruitment announcement, pre-screening survey, and consent form. (Appendix B). It also required the researcher to discuss the purpose, how the study was to be procedurally conducted, time constraints, confidentiality, privacy, risks and benefits, and other salient information for the success of the study.

As stated earlier, snowballing was used to begin this study. The researcher reached out to prospective participants through networking opportunities. Those participants referred the researcher to other potential participants. Additionally, the researcher found participants while being serviced at their local hair salon. The researcher's stylist has clients who are federal workers.

Once participants were contacted, meetings were scheduled. Due to COVID-19, the researcher was aware that face-to-face interviews may not have been feasible. As such, a virtual platform (Zoom) was used for the interviews. All participants had the option of in-person interviews or via a virtual platform. Even as pandemic restrictions were lifted, participants chose the virtual platform option. They appeared at ease and

comfortable in their own environment of choice. All participants appeared on video except for three participants—the option to choose their virtual environment allowed for rich conversations in obtaining data. Following the consent forms submitted to the IRB, the researcher ensured that the participant provided permission to record the interview before proceeding with the questions. The researcher was intentional in obtaining permission to record the interview.

Semi-structured one-on-one interviews were used; this method allowed the researcher to ask prepared open-ended questions and use prompts to continue the dialogue. Interviews ranged from 30 to 45 minutes. Participants were interviewed one time. The first one to three minutes of the interview was to establish a rapport with the participants so they would feel comfortable and speak as freely as possible. The researcher maintained a video presence to promote rapport and ease any anxieties participants may have had prior to the interview. The researcher did not use their video with the three participants who chose not to use their videos to ensure they were at ease for the interview.

The interview questions began with participants explaining their reason(s) for transitioning from chemical to natural hairstyles. Participants received a Target gift card valued at $20 after the interview. The following interview questions were used in the research study as points of departure:

- What made you transition from processed to natural hairstyles?

- What are the written rules/policies on appearance at your agency?

- What are the unwritten rules on appearance at your agency?

- If worked at two or more agencies, what differences have you seen in the organizational culture surrounding Black women and hair?

- Have your co-workers and managers accepted your decision to wear your hair in its natural state? How or how not?

- What have the majority group (White people) said about your hair? Please include any positive or negative comments.

- What comments have you received about your natural hair choice from other groups, including your own?

- What has been your hair experience when interviewing for a new position?

- What are the financial implications in being your authentic self in the workplace?

- Does the culture of your agency support diversity and inclusion? If so, how? If not, explain.

- Given the definition of respectability politics, how does it play out on your job?

The CROWN Act was created in 2019 by Dove and the CROWN Coalition, in partnership with then Senator Holly J. Mitchell of California, to ensure protection against discrimination based on race-based hairstyles by extending statutory protection to hair texture and protective styles such as braids, locs, twists, and knots in the workplace and public schools. As of April 21, 2021, the following states have passed the CROWN Act or amended current laws:

Table 1:

Passing the CROWN Act in Various States

State	Date enacted or signed into law
California	July 3, 2019
New York	July 12, 2019
New Jersey	December 19, 2019
Virginia	July 1, 2020
Colorado	March 6, 2020
Washington	July 1, 2020
Maryland	February 6, 2020
Connecticut	March 4, 2021 -
New Mexico	April 5, 2021
Delaware	April 13, 2021
Nebraska	May 5, 2021
Nevada	June 4, 2021
Oregon	June 11, 2021
Illinois	August 2021
U.S. Virgin Islands	April 11, 2022
Maine	April 20, 2022
Alaska	May 11, 2022
Tennessee	May 27, 2022
Louisiana	June 24, 2022
Massachusetts	July 26, 2022
Arkansas	April 10, 2023
Minnesota	January 31, 2023
Michigan	June 15, 2023

- The CROWN Act was introduced in the House of Representatives and Senate in March 2021. If passed, what impact would a federal law of this stature have on you as a Black woman in the federal government?

- What do you want to see from the majority group in understanding your choice to wear your hair in its natural state?

During the interview, the researcher defined respectability politics to allow participants to probe their engagement in this phenomenon. Once each interview was completed, the researcher assigned a pseudonym to each interview to ensure the privacy and security of all participants' information. It was the responsibility of the researcher to keep participants from harm. It was also important to respect their privacy and ensure participants recognized the difference between anonymity and confidentiality.

The researcher used Raenotes transcription and assessment software to transcribe the Zoom recordings. Raenotes software was compatible with Zoom, allowing for ease of transcription. Once transcription was completed, the researcher continued to identify participants using pseudonyms. All Zoom recordings and Raenotes transcriptions were password-protected to ensure the security and privacy of the data. The laptop was password-protected and secured in a private office in a locked cabinet. Once recordings and transcriptions were completed, the data was ready to be analyzed.

Data Analysis

The researcher was immersed in the analysis process as it was meticulous and took a considerable amount to complete. The researcher looked for information from the participants' responses that gave insight into the topic. Labov used narrative and clauses to break down sentence structure when analyzing transcripts. He kept longer narrative exchanges intact for analytic purposes (Reissman, 2008). The researcher was intentional in keeping such exchanges intact when analyzing the interviews.

A structural analysis was used to give attention to the content and narrative form, intensifying insight beyond referential meanings alone (Riessman, 2008). "Structural narrative analysis allows topics and voices to be included in qualitative research that

might be missing otherwise" (Riessman, 2008, p. 80). Structural analysis was best suited

for this narrative research as it allowed the researcher to unpack the narrative. For

example, the researcher can embrace the oral narrative, slow it down, and step away from

it to see how the participant tells the story in form and language to achieve the desired

effects of persuading the researcher.

The specific model of structural analysis used is William Labov's approach, as

relying only on a thematic analysis might cause the researcher to miss pertinent contrasts

in the meaning of similar events by participants. As thematic analysis provides broad

patterns, structural analysis allows the researcher to observe variations in the meanings of

those patterns.

Labov proposed six elements that make up a "fully formed" narrative: (1) abstract

(summary and/or point of story); (2) Orientation (time, place, characters, situation); (3)

complicating actions (crisis or turning point); (4) evaluation (narrator takes step back);

(5) resolution (outcome of plot); (6) coda (ending story, bring back to present)

(Riessman, 2008). These elements became the codes for analyzing the narrative. It is

important to note that the researcher may not find all elements in the narrative, as stories

are not always linear (Riessman, 2008). Using Labov's method provided greater insight

into how participants shared their experiences related to the topic and how they used

diverse forms in telling their stories. Although not all elements were formed in

participants' responses, the researcher observed that the evaluation element appeared,

explaining why the story was important to the participant.

Structural analysis suited this research as language was taken seriously and

allowed the researcher to observe how participants used speech to construct their

narratives and provide historical context. Because participants were Black, the researcher considered the strata within participants' stories, thus comfortable narrating in a form other than mainstream Eurocentric sequential form. The researcher was aware that respect should be given to participants' lived experiences (Clandinin, 2016).

Note how the transcript translates an experience into dramatic form that identifies structural parts and sequences of the participant's experiences. The researcher analyzed how the narrative was organized.

Table 2:

Transcript Question

Question: What made you transition from process to natural hairstyles?

a So It's funny because um the story is funny, but I've been wanting to go from process um perms or relaxers to natural for a long time.

b since 2000 Eight ISH, I think 2006,

c I've been talking about it and I was going to my girlfriend who's a hairstylist. Um and I told her, I said, you know, I I know I want to transition because I have a lot of breakage and split ends and so forth.

d Um but I just don't want to go through that big chop experience.

e And so it came to a point, I think it was in 2000 nine or 10, right before I started my government job

f where she said I had the same conversation with her and she was styling my hair at the time

g and she said, well I'm gonna trim your ends.

Question: What made you transition from process to natural hairstyles?

h And she ended up doing a big shop um instead because she was like,

i I'm tired of you talking about this, you talk about it all the time, but you never really

do it.

j And so she was cutting it off.

k And so when my hair was done, she said, oh I just want you to know I did your big

chop

l and I said oh my gosh, why did you do just

m because you're going natural is no point.

n So I ended up about that, I was upset with her but she knew if she didn't do it I

probably would have kept coming back to her and say yeah I'll do it next time,

o I'll do it next time.

p And she said I just thought you needed a little bit of push and some assistance to go

into this whole natural phase.

q And so that's what actually prompt me to go natural right away in that moment.

r But I had been talking about it for a long time

s because I wanted my hair to be a little bit more healthier

t um as it wasn't really with the relax that I was the relaxer that I were getting

The table illustrates how the conversation was captured using Labov's coding.

Table 3:

Using Labov's Coding Method to Accompany Transcripts

Code	Description	Clauses
Abstract	The point of the story of how the decision was made to go natural and the process it took to get there.	*a, c, d, f*
Continuing orientation	Discusses the time the narrator first thought about going natural and the role her hairdresser played in the decision.	*b, e, g*
Complicated action	The turning point was when the hairdresser began to get tired of narrator talking about going natural.	*i*
Resolution	Her hairdresser did the big chop.	*j*
Evaluation	She displayed her emotions as she was upset with her hairdresser.	*l, n*
Coda	She brings it back to the present in clause	*q*

Data was organized on digital files. The researcher chose the MAXQDA software program as the computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS). Using MAXQDA, the researcher gained valuable insight into text stories generated by interviews and videos. MAXQDA allowed for the import of transcriptions, audio, and videos. The researcher re-read transcripts and reviewed videos to collect information-rich data for coding and to become familiar with the data. A table was developed to illustrate Labov's six elements for each question during the coding process. The process was tedious and took a considerable amount of time to complete. The researcher took advantage of the memo function to further explore the contemplations and viewpoints of participants.

The researcher completed all 15 interviews. Instead of analyzing all transcripts and videos at the end of the interview process, the researcher began analyzing data after the fourth interview. The remaining interviews continued in parallel with the analysis. Analyzing the data in intervals allowed the researcher to memo intuitions, concepts, and thoughts. By conducting interval analyses, the researcher became a better interviewer as the study progressed, allowing the researcher to ask strategic follow-up questions to some of the participants' responses, thus providing more vigorous and data-rich interviews. This is called "narrative competence" (Reissman, 2008). Around the tenth interview, signs of saturation were visible. Ultimately, MAXQDA software allowed the researcher to organize data better and save time instead of analyzing it by hand.

The researcher combined structural analysis and thematic analysis to develop emerging themes. Further development consisted of using the typologies of complicating action (plot; turning point) and evaluation (the substance of what the narrator is trying to convey) to begin the first cycle of coding. The researcher pulled the complicating actions and evaluations from the participants interviews. Multiple stories can emerge from one complicating action (Ahmed, 2012). In analyzing the data, the complicating actions and evaluations were culturally specific to the phenomenon. The researcher analyzed the stanzas by linking social and cultural context with a holistic approach. By focusing on the complicating action and evaluations in Table 2, the researcher was able to develop multiple stories and interpret the feelings observed and descriptions by the participant.

Pulling from the complication actions and evaluations, the researcher began the coding process. Saldaña (2016) states, "A code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or

evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (p. 3). The researcher began the first cycle by using grammatical methods to begin organizing data (Saldaña, 2016). Specifically, attribute coding. The researcher coded demographics for the participants. Attribute coding can serve as a starting point of qualitative studies (Saldaña, 2016). It allowed the researcher to identify participant descriptive information. Examples included, but were not limited to the following:

PARTICPANT (PSEDDONUM): SHARON

GRADE LEVEL: 13

LENGTH OF FEDERAL SERVICE: 9 YEARS

DATA FORMAT: INTERVIEW 1 OF 15

TIME FRAME: AUGUST 2021

For second level coding the researcher used a combination of In Vivo (verbatim words) as part of the elemental methods used to further filter categories that lays the foundation for further coding (Saldaña, 2016). The researcher also used affective methods with emotion and value coding. Affective methods delve into the human experiences (Saldaña, 2016). Pulling from Labov's evaluation code, the researcher analyzed the crux of what the participants were trying to convey, their belief system, and attitudes towards the phenomenon. The researcher conducted the first and second cycle coding several times to develop categories. Additionally, the researcher determined that versus coding elucidated that there were signs of conflict and microaggression. Memo writing served as a mechanism to review patterns and further narrow categories to reach emerging themes.

Ethics Reflexivity and Researcher Positionality

The researcher ensured that ethical considerations were addressed throughout the study. According to Unger (2021), "Ethical reflexivity involves considering the social and political implications of research, avoiding harm, and ensuring participants' rights while striving for accountability in pursuing scientific goals" (p. 1). Reflexivity is a vital practice in methodology where the researcher is aware of their own social beliefs and partialities (Unger, 2021).

To avoid bias, prejudgments, and/or own experiences, the researcher made every effort to ensure that these factors were mitigated throughout the research process, from setting parameters of sample participants to developing the interview questions. The researcher avoided leading questions; the open-ended questions were only a point of departure to begin the discussion. The researcher allowed participants to add any other context to the research to maintain authenticity and objectiveness throughout the study.

The researcher understood that as an instrument, they could be vulnerable in displaying emotions as they took and encountered some of those experiences as the participants. Therefore, it was important for the researcher to utilize memos and notes during data collection and analysis to ruminate on their individual experiences of the phenomenon, centered on their positionality, and to ensure participants' voices were honored and valued (Gadson & Lewis, 2022).

Chapter Summary

Chapter Three discussed the qualitative methodology process and the justification for using narrative research methodology. The chapter also explained using structural narrative analysis instead of the traditional thematic analysis. The researcher provided

major elements of the qualitative methodology process by describing sampling, data

collection, and data analysis. The researcher also included the importance of ethics and

reflexivity. The researcher explained how they guarded against their own possibility if

bias in the study during the data collection process. The following chapter presents the

findings of the study.

Chapter 4: Results

People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will

never forget how you made them feel.

- Maya Angelou

The purpose of this narrative study was to understand the impact on career advancement of Black women in the federal government who choose to wear their hair in its natural textured state. The researcher sought to understand Black women's experiences. This chapter presents the results of the study, starting with a brief on participants' profiles and then the emerging themes from the interviews.

Participants' Profiles

The ethical balance of privacy and confidentiality is essential in protecting participants. Researchers must be cognizant of protecting privacy by masking names when developing profiles (Creswell, 2018). During the data analysis phase, participants were given pseudonyms to mask their identities. These pseudonyms had no significant value to the researcher.

This narrative study consisted of 15 participants from the Washington metropolitan commuting area. All participants identified as African American/Black women, GS-12 or above, who have worked in the federal government for at least three years. While narrative analysis seeks to understand the experiences and beliefs told through stories, the researcher chose to provide a brief introductory profile of each participant.

Francine. Francine is an African American woman who has worked in the Federal Government for fifteen years. Francine is currently a GS-14. She has tried several

times to transition from chemically treated to natural hair and now wears locs. Francine

transitioned to natural hair when she was 30 years old. She stated,

> I got tired of the smell of the chemicals, my hair was falling out." She felt that she
>
> was limiting herself when her hair was chemically straightened. "It just didn't
>
> work with my lifestyle because I'd go to the hairdresser, and then I wouldn't go
>
> swimming. I wouldn't want to work out for the longest time.

Wren. Wren is an African American woman who has worked in the Federal

Government for 35 years. Wren is a GS-13. Wren transitioned due to changes in her

body.

> I was starting to experience menopause symptoms, so I was sweating in my hair
>
> more than normal and I was finding that with me, having a perm, the chemicals,
>
> that it wasn't lasting." Wren felt her body was resetting itself as a result of
>
> menopause. "It was kind of, like you know, your body is going through changes
>
> and your hormones readjusting to your age.

Sharon. Sharon is an African American woman who has worked in the Federal

Government for nine years. Sharon is a GS-13. Sharon had been thinking about

transitioning for a long time but never did until her hairstylist turned a trim into the "big

chop." Sharon said her hairstylist got tired of her talking about cutting her hair and going

natural. She said this was the push she needed toward the natural phase. Her goal was the

health of her hair. "I had been talking about it for a long time because I wanted my hair to

be a little more healthier."

Synthia. Synthia is an African American woman who has worked in the federal

government for 35 years. She is a GS-14. Synthia decided to go natural when she was

seven months pregnant with her first son. Her hairdresser was pregnant as well. She said, "What am I going to do with my hair?" My hairdresser stated, "Just go ahead and cut it. I just cut my hair off and started being natural. And that's how I got started. I never went back." Synthia has been natural for 28 years.

Dominique. Dominique is an African American woman who has worked in the Federal government for 28 years. Dominique is a GS-14 and has worn her natural hair since 2011. She made her decision to go natural when she was diagnosed with breast cancer. She explained, "And then in 2011, I was diagnosed with breast cancer. And the treatment that I was taking, the chemotherapy, it brought my hair out. I lost all of my hair."

Sasha. Sasha is an African American woman who has worked in the federal government for 27 years and is a GS-15. She has worn her natural hair for about four to five years.

> What made me transition is the fact that chemicals had damaged my hair." Sasha also had stress-related issues as well: "In addition, I had personal situations that were evolving in my life that was actually affecting my hair growth. So, I made the decision to actually just kind of eliminate certain stress levels in my life and eliminate chemicals used in my hair.

Medallion. Medallion is an African American woman who has worked in the Federal government for 29 years. Medallion is a GS-15. She has been natural for 24 years. Medallion stated,

Well, I transitioned because I was having a lot of issues with my hair. I had very thin hair, and so I found that when I was perming my hair that it wasn't showing up the way that I wanted. That was one of the reasons.

Tina. Tina is an African American woman. She is a GS-14 and has worked in the Federal government for 20 years. Tina explains her reasons for transitioning from chemicals to natural:

Just the concern about the health and quality of my hair over a period of time. I relaxed a lot of times for ease and comfort because I work out a lot. And then I guess the social norms that you've kind of grown up under and about, certain hairstyles and everything. And so, it just got to a point for me that I just decided to transition just for quality of life and you know the suspected outcomes or effects associated with relaxing your hair for an extended period of time.

Natalie. Natalie is an African American woman who is a GS-14 and has been a federal employee for 14 years. She decided to transition to wearing her hair naturally at a young age. Natalie stated:

Like when I transitioned, there wasn't a natural hair care movement at the time. I just noticed that people could get my hair pretty straight without the perm. And when I made the decision, actually, I was in eighth grade, it was my own decision that I made. I told my mom that I didn't want to get perms anymore. It's because I just hated it. I hated having to sit and wait for them to wash it out. Because if you would tell them, oh, it's, it's burning a little or whatever, It's like, oh, you're just sensitive and they just, you know, spray the water bottle or whatever. So for me, it was just kind of like, well, since I don't get them that often and they can blow dry

my hair and flat iron it without it, I'm gonna try that. And then I also at the time I had an obsession with Aaliyha and she had that long hair and I didn't know that it was a weave. I just thought it was hers. So, I really wanted my hair to be like super, super long and I just, for some reason thought maybe if I stopped getting perms and it'll grow longer.

Elaine. Elaine is an African American woman. She has been a civil service employee for 21 years and is a GS-12. She has worn her hair naturally for approximately 23 years. She transitioned to maintain the health of her hair. She stated:

I was experiencing some thinning and some damage from the process and from the chemicals and actually my stylist, my, hairdresser said I am shooting myself in the foot, but I recommend that you go natural. She said that your hair is so soft, you have a natural curl pattern, no matter how much we straighten it, you're gonna go back to your natural curl pattern because that's how, you know, God made your hair. So, it was a combination of dealing with some of the thinning and the falling out from using chemicals probably too strong or inappropriately.

Terron. Terron is an African American woman who has worked in the Federal government for 30 years. Terron is a GS-14. She transitioned to natural because of her physical fitness activities. She asserted,

I used to teach aerobics, and it was hot every day. I would have to go home, wash my hair, blow it out and curl, hot curl every single day. So, I cut it all off and started. That's how I started. I started with little twist.

Patricia. Patricia is an African American woman and provides a military perspective where there were written grooming policies and at civilian government

agencies where there are no written policies on appearance. Patricia said she transitioned from chemically treated hair to natural hair. She said, "I woke up and realized that those things are, um, bad for me and my hair, and it was tearing me up, and I needed to stop and go natural and that's what I did." Patricia is a GS-13 and was an active-duty member of the armed forces for 22 years. She has worked for the federal government as a civil servant for eight years.

Shannon. Shannon is a Black woman who has been a federal employee since 1990 and has been natural since 1996. Shannon is a GS-14. Shannon said she transitioned because she saw someone who looked like her. She said:

> I think the first conscious thought I had about transitioning from wearing a perm to going natural occurred to me back in the early 1990s when I took a course in African American Studies at George Mason University because it was the first time in my life where I saw someone who looked like me, who stood confident in who they were as an African American female. And that person for me was my African American professor at that time.

Michelle. Michelle is a Black woman from an eastern Caribbean Island. She has been a civil servant for 17 years and is a GS-13. Michelle said she transitioned from chemical to natural permanently in 2016. Michelle said, "The chemicals were pretty much killing my hair. Then the texture wasn't the same anymore. I was getting patches and then I just felt like I needed to embrace my natural self. It was cost-effective to me."

Paula. Paula is an African American woman. She has worked in the federal government for 38 years. Paula is a GS-14, and of those 38 years, Paula has been natural
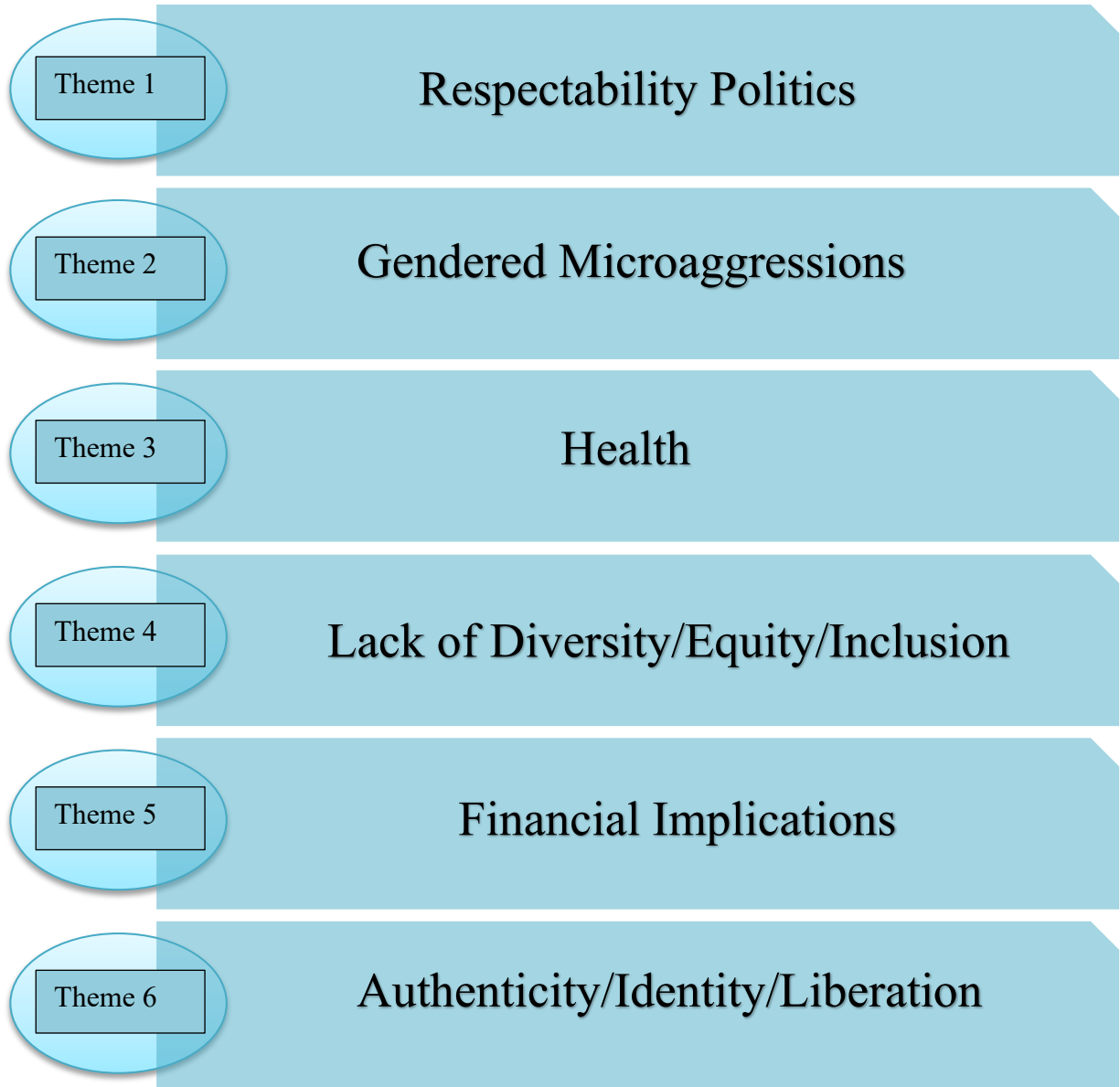
since 2000. Paula said she transitioned to natural hair because she wanted more flexibility

and volume in her hair. She did not want her hair straight all the time. Paula explained:

> I wanted more body and not necessarily so straight that I didn't have that, that
>
> body flexibility. So that was the main issue. And then secondly, the second part of
>
> it was I just wanted it to go back to my natural hair because it was healthier at a
>
> natural state.

The profiles of the participants suggest that their natural hairstyles serve as a

catalyst to converge with race and gender and that barriers exist that lend to the structural

violence that Black women often endure in the workplace because of their many different

identities. Despite enduring the unique challenges, stereotypes, implicit and explicit

biases, and barriers, Black women still believe in expressing their authenticity in the

workplace.

Themes

The goal of this research study was to understand the impact on career

advancement of Black women in the federal government who choose to wear their hair in

its natural textured state through their lived experiences. After a thorough analysis of the

information obtained by the participants, the following themes emerged (Figure 1).

Figure 1:

Emergent Themes

Theme 1	Respectability Politics
Theme 2	Gendered Microaggressions
Theme 3	Health
Theme 4	Lack of Diversity/Equity/Inclusion
Theme 5	Financial Implications
Theme 6	Authenticity/Identity/Liberation

Theme 1: Respectability Politics

Only one participant was familiar with the term "respectability politics." Some

described how they unconsciously engaged in respectability politics after the researcher

read the definition. How participants decided how to wear their hair was strongly influenced by respectability politics. Sharon wore her hair in twists. However, she wanted to try another natural hairstyle. Regarding race and gender, when asked about appearance and showing up to work as a Black woman wearing natural hairstyles, Sharon stated:

> As so when I had my twist my supervisor at the time was also an African American woman. My team lead was an African American woman and both had natural hair. They wore it straight. One who was the team lead had locs and then the supervisor wore her straight curled and that was her look every day. And so when I had my twist, I would wrestle back and forth with, well, I want to wear my hair in this bush, its natural state, and I'm not certain. I would talk with them and they will say, 'well, you know, there's nothing wrong with wearing that, but you just want to make sure you're a little bit presentable'. And I'm like, I dress up every day like I look great. There's nothing wrong with my look. But it was this underlining tone where you wouldn't want to wear a bush to work. Would you like you don't want people to look at you a certain way. And that kind of made me wrestle back and forth with how much I wanted to push it to be naturally me and not have to hide my natural hairstyle just because I'm worried about my colleagues and how they might look at me and how I might appear to them because you can make a natural hairstyle look professional in a professional setting that shouldn't dictate how professional you are as an individual or your competencies and what you can do to perform on a job really well. So there are a lot of undertones with naturalness in the workplace, especially like an office setting.

Wren explained:

> And I think some women, um, the reason why they haven't made that choice is
> because they feel like that they're going to be discriminated against based on their
> look and not their knowledge. I think that if more women of color, who are in
> positions higher up, if they decided to stop, you know, letting them dictate to
> them how they should look in whatever and if they want to wear brave, then it
> shouldn't be okay. Well, I'm going on vacation for two weeks, so I'll go braid my
> hair. And I was like that when I'm on vacation, but when they come back to the
> workforce, they feel like they got to take them out, and then they got to curl their
> hair, and they got to look a certain way.

Sasha explained:

> I've kind of been exposed to the fact that you can come in and entry level
> positions being who you are. But as you elevate and matriculate in your
> government career as a professional, you tend to customize and tailor your look to
> be more professional, meaning that if you did wear natural hairstyle, it's kept and
> groaned or pull back in such a way that it's not obvious, maybe that is a natural
> look, but um something that is well groomed and cats.

Patricia acknowledged that she did not know the definition of respectability
politics. However, once she understood its meaning, she stated:

> Yes, because a lot of people did not know what it meant. But once they get to the
> definition, they would go back and say, oh yeah, well, you know, I changed my
> hairstyle, I changed the way I look a certain way on the outside, but I present

differently at work. So, um, just not knowing the definition, you know, many people, including myself, engaged in that.

Terron acknowledged that her perspective comes from a historical point of view, her upbringing as a child, and how her parents instilled what was presentable. Terron elaborated: "I would think if you're on a certain floor or in front of certain people. More often, I always felt like there was a certain way that, you know, we had to present ourselves on that certain floor."

Natalie explained that choosing how she shows up for her is not assimilating. She explained that she comes from the perspective of an etiquette professional. Natalie stated:

I feel like I feel like the argument for my choice to maybe not wear my like natural hair to an interview would be somebody saying that that's respectability politics or that I'm assimilating. But I think that sometimes those decisions are not necessarily based on race as much as it is based on like the time and the place, you know, um at least for me personally, I, I am an etiquette professional. I love all things etiquette, and a lot of times, that is put into this box of like Black versus White or dominant versus marginalized. Um uh And I do know that the, the, the origins of etiquette obviously came from, you know, Europe, but I think the decision is actually more of like a class thing. I'm less than, you know, me trying to advance, advance my race by assimilating to the dominant. Because, like I said, I, I will definitely wear my hair out and big. Actually, did it for an entire training that I was facilitating for school nutrition professionals and, and yeah, I mean, it was, that's just, it was just my hair, you know, but um, but I, I think that again, it just depends on the time and the place and like where I'm at, what decision that I

would, I would make regarding my personal style and what, what I want to look like. But I do think that there, there is some truth to respectability, politics, especially maybe not so much now in 2023 as it was in, like, you know, 1990, you know, even before President Obama was in office, like I do think that those things for sure existed.

Respectability politics keeps those from obtaining their true worth when surrendering those rights for the same result. It keeps those from truly advocating for themselves that sustains that same patriarchy in the workplace. Notwithstanding, respectability politics is a mechanism to keep Black women doubly chained.

Theme 2: Gendered Microaggressions (Racial)

Another theme participants illustrated is the use of everyday subtle slights by other colleagues in the form of microaggressions. Their responses captured their perceived invisibility and hypervisibility. They explained through their conversations how the intersection of their social group (Black women) and their experiences are rendered invisible by other dominant social groups. Notwithstanding the structural violence caused by others, gendered microaggressions specifically targeted Black women.

When asked the question about the written policy, Synthia stated:

And then when I was letting it grow out, it wasn't a policy, but it was a lot of attention because I had with it, you know, back then I was wearing a nappy bush, like on a regular and um it was more like, let me feel your hair, let me touch your hair and I'm different. . . .It made me feel some kind of way. I didn't like that. I didn't care for that. I mean, I know it was curiosity. Um, and these were people

that I've never felt comfortable asking me that, but still it was, and then

sometimes I did, you know, I took my head over like that, let em touch it. But,

um, after a while, I got to feel certain type of way. And this was like way before it

became, you know, that you see it as often as you do men.

Dominique asserted:

Yeah, there's a lot of unwritten rules. I can share an incident. And I think it made

me more aware of the unspoken rule. I wear my hair in braids and other protective

styles. Right. And I wore the braids the first time I had gotten it braided up in a

very ethical style. Right. And I was coming out of my manager's office, who is a,

um, Caucasian woman, and I exited her office, and directly across from her office

was, um, the office of the then chief of staff, who was an African American

woman. And she was walking out of her office, said, Hi, and we both joined to

walk out of the building. And another Caucasian woman walked down, and I

couldn't understand why. Um, my sister with the long, straight hair said to the

Caucasian woman coming towards us, how do you like Dominique's hair? And

the White woman said, the Caucasian woman said, 'oh, it's different.' I felt about

an inch. I don't know why. I felt small, and I felt humiliated. And all I could do is

get into the elevator as quickly as I could. The statement that was made and the

response, it made me feel like my hair there was something wrong with my hair,

and it was beautiful. And for another woman, who I perceived as my sister

because we are sisters and our ethnicity right would say that and try to, uh, this

day, every time I see well, prior to COVID, when I would see this woman, I

would have to turn a different way, because I was so afraid that I was going to say something to her because it triggered me every time I saw her.

Natalie described another experience she had with a Black female colleague at a previous age. Natalie asserted:

Actually, this hasn't happened in my current agency, but at my last agency, and it used to, like, really hurt my feelings because, um, this person was actually a friend of mine, but she would come, and she would take her hand and like, literally, rub it up the nape of my neck into my hair trying to, to make sure that there were no extensions or pieces, like, like your hair is so pretty, you know, and put her hand all in there and go like, like, you know, shake, shake her hand in my hair to make sure that I wasn't like kind of, you know, faking the funk and she would do this like all the time as though she didn't know that this was, you know, my hair. Um, Now I do. Sometimes, I like to wear weaves or, which I'll call Rashida. Um But, but at the time that we were together and I, and I was like in my, in my twenties, it was like my early stage of my federal government career. But that was the thing that was really, was really interesting was almost like, they didn't believe that um you know, a black woman could have this kind of hair. Um And, and that has been really disappointing to me because I, I think that there's a lot of black women that have beautiful hair, but there's just this, I think the media and our own culture sometimes, you know, resigns us to only one way of being. Um And, and so if you were indoctrinated in that this is what Black women look like. Their hair is only this type of hair. They're only this type of skin complexion, they only have these types of features. Then when you see somebody who's Black

and that's not that um there's like this, this conflict within you to try to figure out what is it. Um And I've even had some of those black women at work um argue with me about whether I was mixed with something or not.

Medallion stated:

Well, I can think in the agency that I'm currently in, they said that in order for me to climb the ladder and to be accepted into these higher leadership roles that I needed to look like everyone else and that I should stop showing up with my hair looking the way it was with the color because they didn't like that. I wore colors like my suits or my glasses. They didn't want any type of, you know, funkiness or identity. They wanted me to wear black and blue and brown and to mask my hair because it did not fit in with what the norm was.

When asked what other colleagues said about their natural hairstyle, Tina explained that she actually received a comment from a White colleague but did not know what to expect when the woman approached her about her hair. Tina expressed:

You know I think they've been pretty accepting of my hair. I've always pulled it back and, you know, not really, um, attend to do risky styles. Actually, I had a manager come to me one day, and she said um, and I'm quoting her, 'I don't mean to be offensive.' And so that pretty much got me on guard. And I was with another White manager, and she too was a White manager, and she said, "I don't mean to be offensive, and I hope this I'm not speaking out of character." And both of us kind of looked at each other like here we go, but she said your hair is simply amazing. She said, 'it's so versatile, it's so beautiful, and I've always admired

black women's hair, and I wish I had that.' But, I was I was guarded for what was to come, but that's the path that she went down and she made a lot of comments about my hair from that point forward. So, I think it's been pretty accepting. It's never been, um, talked about other than that comment. I don't know if people say other things, but I do have some coworkers that that will wear their hair in afros and you know, all those things and I think that they aren't well accepted in that in that environment because of that.

When asked about interview experiences with natural hairstyles, Francine explained:

Now that I'm thinking about it, I did apply for other jobs within, within my office since I've had dreadlocks and I haven't gotten them. Who knows maybe my hair was part of it. Um but there were certainly other things going on. But yeah, and one of them in particular that I'm thinking about is this woman who came from a racist organization. Um, and I, I never thought that she, that she and I particularly had a connection, and part of it could have been my hair. I mean, the person that she wanted to hire over me, um you know, it was wasn't another White woman. Um, but that woman ended up not getting, not getting the job either because she had less experience than me. And I had been with the office and have been really much doing the job and my supervisor had said no, if you hire this other person that the woman wanted to hire over me, then there would be issues.

Francine further explained what triggered her to participate in this study was an experience her daughter's friend had while interviewing for a job.

Francine stated:

So yeah, I want to tell you what reminded me that I needed to get back in touch

with you this time. So, I have a 17-year-old daughter, and both my girls wear their

hair natural. Their hair has never been relaxed. And it has been their choice.

They've never wanted to have their hair relaxed. They don't blow dry it straight,

either. Uh and, my 17-year-old was looking for a new job, and she got a job at a

restaurant. And I think at the time that she interviewed for the job, she might have

been wearing her hair in braids. I'm not particularly sure because her hair; yeah, I

think she had gotten her hair braided before she went for interview. But she was

telling me about one of her friends who was also looking for a job, a Black

woman or a Black girl, and she wears her hair in a short afro. And my daughter

wears her hair like in a short afro or like yours when it's not in braids. She told me

that her friend interviewed at the same place at the same restaurant, and the

restaurant the manager told her that they weren't going to hire her because of her

natural hair, and I was like, wait, they told her this? And she said, yep, and I just,

my blood just boiled, and I just was so pissed off and so upset, and then I was

like, oh wait, I was supposed to be helping, I know what they're doing.

When asked how others perceived her based on gender and race, Medallion declared,

So most of the colleagues at the management level were all males, mostly White

males, some Asian, um so based on gender that already sets me apart. And just

being a part of the meetings, people don't really listen to my feedback or my

input. It's really been challenging because I will recommend something and then

someone else will take credit for that recommendation. And it just really makes

me feel that, you know, to me it just amplifies why I have to keep my hair the way it is, because they're not accepting me in the day-to-day activities. So at least out, like in meetings, I'll just kind of rub my hair like, okay, you know, even though this is going in a not so great way, I'm still going to keep going because you know, I told you I locked my hair and this lady who has transitioned, you know, I feel like her energy is with me. And even though it's not easy, I continue on this path.

Tina remembered that one Black male colleague had a comment about her hair.

Tina declared:

Yeah, I mean, I've had one guy suggest I wear it straight all the time, but you know, I don't aspire to do that. So yeah, he's actually a Black man that dates White women, particularly and or Hispanic women, and he just said straight hair just looks better on women, period. And Black women don't tend to attract Black men because they won't straighten their hair or wear straight wigs all the time.

When asked if there were distinct differences in hair grooming at other agencies, Elaine asserted:

I definitely felt it more at a prior agency and one agency over the other. I think a lot of that had to do with location and culture. I worked in an extremely, it was a much, much smaller office, at least, and I was definitely the minority in the group. And when I say minority, not only as an African American but as an American, because I was on a border office that catered to people of various cultures, coming from other countries. And so, my appearance to them always stood out. I've gotten questions, I got a lot of um comments, some positive, some negative, some

just curiosity questions. So it was definitely an elephant in the room. I think a lot

of it had to do with a lack of understanding. For instance, I've worn head wraps

before as part of my African culture, and it is considered grooming. It's a basic

head wrap, and someone asked me was I going to fight the power that day? And I

was so confused and they were referring to my head wrap. I did have a supervisor

tell me they recommend that I not wear it again.

Shannon felt she always had to fight for visibility and to be heard. She believes she

was invited to the table only because she is a Black woman, not to be valued. Shannon

declared:

I've always sort of felt like I had to fight to have a voice, you know, where I

would be present at meetings. And for the most part of my federal career, I was

the only person of color. The only woman of color sitting at a table in meetings

with executives. And even though I was there physically right there, you know, I

had to assert myself. Hey, I'm here. Because people would always speak over me.

I'd be talking, and they would just talk right over me. And um I, I perceive that to

be, 'we have you here but we don't really want to hear what you have to say

because you're not fitting the mold of what we think.' Yeah, you should look like

you're too different, but we need a black person here, right? So you're here. Just

sit here.

Gendered microaggressions are multilayered. It is like death by a thousand cuts.

Black women tend to brush off the one slight, but those slights keep manifesting

overtime. Metaphorically speaking, one can bleed out with so many slights. These slights,

not usually covered under the laws, can have lasting mental and physical effects. These ongoing slights feed into the caste system of race and gender.

Theme 3: Health (Physical and Mental)

All participants' reasons for transitioning from chemical to natural were associated with health concerns. Against the backdrop of structural violence, as described in Chapter Two, these women made choices based on health concerns to eliminate barriers that improve self-preservation and well-being. Participants were asked why they transitioned from chemically processed hair to natural hair. Dominique explained that she transitioned because she was diagnosed with breast cancer; she further elaborated:

> I get angry. I get angry because I feel that it goes even down to the baby powder. Right? Just the fact that they knew that they were putting chemicals in these products, um, psychologically, we were told to be beautiful. We had to have straight hair. And the lie and the things that they were putting in it, they knew from a chemical perspective that it was damaging to our health. So I get angry, um, I really do. And I even try to share. And I did a lot of research during my healing process on, uh, what to do and different things. And I make sure that I inform younger women and just women as a whole. Leave that stuff out of your hair. It's not making you more beautiful than who you actually are. It's damaging your health. We're beautiful in our natural state.

Sharon said she transitioned to preserve the health of her hair. Sharon stated: "I told her, you know, I want to transition because I have a lot of breakage and split ends and so forth."

Francine felt that she was limiting herself when her hair was chemically straightened. Not only was her hair falling out, but her lifestyle was becoming limiting. Francine stated: "It just didn't work with my lifestyle really because I'd go to the hairdresser and then I wouldn't go swimming. I wouldn't want to work out for the longest time." Patricia explained how chemicals used on her hair affected her health. She said:

> I had sores in my head from relaxers. I had breakage when I went natural, all my hair fell out. As a matter of fact, I, I was burnt so bad that I was um considering filing a lawsuit against the stylist that did my hair. A few back years ago when I had a relaxer and that just made me switch out to going natural. So I was really burnt bad where I had scabs that you can see, you know, and uh it was so embarrassing. It was puss coming out. I mean, it was really horrible and I felt like beauty is not worth this. And if it really is beauty, I think I had to redefine my definition of myself and my hair for my hair of what beauty is. So that's what I mean by my wisdom, the change, the suffering, it was all an experience that if I had to do it all over again, I would not.

Patricia further discussed the mental effects that conforming had on her. She said:

> Um, the way I present myself and the way I talk, the way I write, um to even down to, to who I am. And I have to really think about things before I send them or before I respond. And it's always thinking about how this will be received as a Black female, coming from a black female. And to me, that is exhausting.

Black women embracing their choice to wear their hair in its natural state saw this as a liberating experience. It manifested into physical and mental health gains, yet they were keenly aware of the implications of their choice.

Theme 4: Lack of Impactful Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion (DEI) Policies

DEI policies are established with reasonably good intentions. However, those policies can hit differently when the impact of said policies affecting marginalized groups has not been thoroughly addressed. When asked if their agencies supported diversity, equity, and inclusion,

Patricia stated:

I'm going to take my time on this question, please because it, it, it's really sensitive and I, I want to make sure I give you an answer from my viewpoint. Diversity, equity, and inclusion and accessibility. It's hot right now, and is the topic that we all should be mindful of and seek training in and leaders of any agency? Diversity, equity and inclusion and accessibility at the forefront of their mindset because, you know, the human capital of any organization is what makes the organization thrive. So you want diversity of thought, diversity and skill set, diversity and expertise, diversity in age, diversity in gender. I mean, you, we all know this as leaders, and we preach this as leaders, but the actions is what show for us any agency. We can, we can buzzword these words all day, and we could have committees, we could form, you know, bylaws and chairs and all of these great, great things to build a foundation for inclusion. But if we still, you know, are not changing and really embracing diversity in the way it should be, you know, thought of or granted it, it's just lip service. And honestly, I see small change, and when I say small change, these changes can easily revert back to a norm of not existing. So I personally would like to see more across, great, across expertise, across leadership. And I, um honestly, I, I, I'm not seeing that in my

agency. I hear it, but I'm not seeing it. And when those two things don't line up.

There's no actions being taken in my opinion.

Dominque said:

So DEIA is the buzzword, right? It's the word that's out there. But is it truly? Can

you see the actions in my organization? No, I think it's a check off the box. Um,

it's a check off the box in such that as it relates to Blacks, African Americans,

diversity, inclusion, equity, accessibility, they look for the other to fulfill the other

alphabet in DEIA, and that's a way of keeping, I believe, us from the table.

Elaine declared:

I think on paper, it supports it because there are high profile efforts and discussion

in trying to get there. The narrative and the conversations are happening, but I

cannot say that I've seen a lot of results. So, the narrative is happening because,

you know, of the presidential mandate. In theory, on paper, there are discussions,

there are things being mentioned, but I have not seen the result of a huge change.

As part of understanding diversity from the perspective of other groups, Terron

explained the process of others learning about natural hair choices. Terron further

elaborated:

This is how my hair grows out of my hair. And it is just if you have a question

about it, ask the question, and you know what? I honestly, you know, a lot of

black women say they don't want people touching their hair. But if that's the only

way they know how to understand, I, I don't even mind it. I really don't, I don't

think I would mind it. I don't think I would, you know. If that's the only way they

can get it, under the understand it. You know, because part of learning and

understanding is asking questions. And so, if we're gonna say, uh we want you to understand it, how else are they gonna learn? What, are they gonna go on youtube and learn all about it? No, I mean, they may or may not have, have people who they feel comfortable asking that to or, you know, or have, or just have never asked and have been curious. I don't think they should ask in a derogatory way. They don't have to say, why do you.

The more they stood out the less room there was for diversity. Showing up as one's true self can make others uncomfortable, valuing conformity over diversity.

Theme 5: Financial Implications (Upward Mobility)

When asked if they believed there were financial implications in how they presented themselves at their agencies, all but one participant believed that they were impacted financially due to their appearance. The one participant who believed she was not impacted noted that she had not applied for any positions after the GS-12 for personal reasons. These financial implications encompass the structural racism that permeated the candid discussion of their perceptions and experiences.

Patricia stated:

I actually personally feel that way. I mean, it's truly no way to prove it. But uh yeah, I, I feel like I have to change and alter my hair um to satisfy a look to get a job for promotion. You're talking hundreds of thousands of dollars over years. Yes, it, it affects you. It affects your, your your living standard. It affects, you know, how you're able to grow and what you're able to do. So, yeah, it, I would say yes, my appearance being a Black American female has to be in correlation with a certain look, and if it's not, it hinders you from moving forward, and that

cost in my lifetime of where I project my experience and where I should be has

cost me, it cost me make probably hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Dominique declared:

I do believe being my authentic self and being in the natural state has hindered me

from promotions. Um, that would be the financial ramifications of it, um, if that's

what you're talking about. Yes, ma'am, and if you look at it, right, 2011, it started

out when my hair started coming back after chemo. Um, it started coming back

very slowly in the natural state. And I went from what the world would say, a

TWA, a teeny-weeny Afro. And then you do the two-strand twist and then just

sew it. And at each stage, folk looking at you like, when are you going to perm

your hair? When are you going to straighten your hair? Right. Yeah. Because I've

seen, um, Caucasian women come in in similar positions, and in less than two

years, they have their next grade level. Is it directly tied to the hair? I believe it is

tied to the appearance of what the organization believes is acceptable.

Shannon shared:

Financial implications are far-reaching? Because, like I said, that position, I

believe I was fully qualified for, right? That wasn't even the only position. I've

been at GS-14 now for, I want to say, well, over 15, 16, about, yeah, about 16

years now. Right. So, I've over the years applied for many fifteens. Could you

imagine if I had gotten that um was selected right, for that position back then,

right? That would have meant more money, right? Coming into my house.

Absolutely. Yeah. So, the financial implications are far-reaching, and had I, you

know, been selected for that 15 position or any one of those many 15 positions; it

could have been very likely I would have been an SES by now, right? With even greater earning potential. So, then yes, there are financial implications to being you, know, discriminated against because of natural hair.

Michelle said that when she went for an interview for a higher-paying position, the one time she wore her hair naturally, the interview panel consisted of an all-white panel. Michelle asserted:

> I maybe went to an interview maybe once with my natural hair and the panel was mainly white people. So, I felt that maybe I didn't meet the, I didn't fit what they were looking for. So, I always wear a wig trying to cover up my natural hair to go to an interview. They won't make a comment because I could file an EEO complaint, you know, based on my race or, you know, so they wouldn't. I don't think anybody in their right mind will make a comment. But will they give you the position based on your looks? I don't think they would.

Paula explained that she believed to advance in one's career, you must look the part. She asserted:

> If your hair is pleasingly done, in other words, if it's shoulder length in a straight or curly way that is not unruly, like not all over your head, people don't normally pay attention to it. But for instance, your hair is a little messy, um, meaning it has no pattern to it. It's just on, you know, just all over the place. It does draw questions. Mhm, and it's been my experience that regardless of the style you wear, if your style is professional looking, meaning everything is intact, it will have an advantage. I think you do have an advantage in people looking at you as a as a

completed package. If your hair is, you know, nappy or not necessarily combed appropriately, that would also impact mobility.

Demystifying the majority's societal beauty standards can have dire professional consequences, which may hinder employment opportunities and/or promotions as well as retirement implications for successful sustainable living after federal service.

Theme 6: Identity/Authenticity/Liberation

Another theme participants elaborated on was what it meant to express their authenticity at work. Their responses captured their realities in reaching their potential of being their authentic selves. Many of their experiences provided examples of the impact structural violence had on embracing their identity.

Patricia explained that it is hard to be authentic at work. She elaborated:

I think I am one way at work and I am one way amongst my friends and at home and um, any good leader understands that. However, as a Black, and I hate to keep using race as a factor, but it is as a Black female, I have to totally switch up. I mean, the way I talk, um, depending on who I talk to. It is impossible, really impossible for me to be my authentic self. And that's how I feel.

One participant described how she felt deflated when asked about her interview experiences when wearing her natural hair. Shannon stated:

It made me feel deflated, you know, I felt um discouraged, I felt frustrated. I felt helpless too because I didn't feel as though I was given a fair shot because of my physical appearance, but I didn't know how to navigate um bringing that to the forefront. Who do I talk to about feeling like I was being discriminated against because of my physical appearance. I didn't know who to talk to. I didn't know

who to trust. Um, because at the time I was aware of some incidents, incidents that had happened and people who had reported and things, um, weren't kept confidential like they should have. So I knew I didn't really want to go that route and I just felt helpless like, you know, here it is, I have all these um degrees, I have all these credentials, I'm qualified. But because I show up in what people perceive as this natural. Because I, I believe that people equate natural hair to being those who are in touch with their culture and their history, and those who are confident, and those who are going to speak up, and hold them accountable if we are not treated or even it doesn't even have to be us, others. So I, I just, I believe that once they see that natural hair, and see that you are educated and articulate, they're not going to pick you because they would prefer to work with folks that look like them or folks who, you know, who I guess by wearing your hair a certain way, who still subscribe right to their uh perception of what beauty should be and how you show up as opposed to someone who's who is like me. I'm not doing this. This is who I am. This I this is what I look like.

When asked how participants would feed if the CROWN Act became a federal law, Patricia stated:

Oh, it's empowering it. It will clearly show that we are removing barriers, we are eliminating stereotypes. We are operating in a culture or a continent that accepts people for who they are, where they come from and who they show up as it is needed.

And it's sad that it has to be a law.

Natalie stated:

> Personally, as a black woman, I have not had any direct discrimination based on
> my hair. I also realize that I come from a place of privilege and that my natural
> hair doesn't look like everybody else's natural hair. And so I think that there's
> even politics around that, uh you know, in terms of like certain textures of hair
> and how the hair lays and, and all of that. Um so I, I haven't had any personal
> discrimination based off of my choice of wearing my natural hair. So, the Crown
> Act passage, for me personally, wouldn't have a huge impact. But I think at the
> federal level, if that was passed, just, it's the message that it was sent nationally
> that would touch my heart in a personal way because it, it's saying that the people
> of Congress Republican and Democrat, um you know, really care about the
> protection of people for who they are and are representing all Americans, not just
> a subset.

Elaine declared: "I've gotten older in my career. I do not let it impact me because I am past letting what people think, especially about my hair or my appearance, impact me."

Terron explained that she cannot fully display her authenticity in certain settings, meaning she must engage in code-switching. Terron explained:

> I am not my authentic self around certain groups. I may focus on my speech
> pattern. I might change, you know, just change the way I engage. And, part of
> actually the way I, dress. The way I, like I said, talk, the way I present myself. It
> is for a certain audience.

Despite the added thought process in determining how to present themselves at work, the participants had no regrets about transitioning from chemically treated hair to

their natural textured hair. Black women are trying to break the chains of social bondage they are taught to take on and internalize to achieve results that never come to fruition.

Summary

This research study was designed to understand the impact on the career advancement of Black women in the federal government who choose to wear their hair in its natural textured state related to participants' experiences. This study comprised 15 participants from various cabinet-level agencies. After coding using Labov's structural narrative analysis was conducted, six themes emerged. Participants' experiences provided a wealth of information during the analysis process. Although their experiences were different, participants shared commonalities in the six emerging themes. Their experiences shed light on obstacles and barriers they believe are important to overcome in creating true authenticity and creativity for success. The following themes gave context to this narrative study.

1. The perception of how other colleagues thought of them to make them feel they needed to engage in 'respectability politics' in the workplace;

2. Understanding and being aware of gendered microaggressions and how they negatively impacted how they presented in the workplace;

3. Recognition of choosing health for self-care and self-preservation as part of their identity;

4. The view that there were multi-layered factors in careers that lead to financial implications in expressing true identity;

5. The view that there is a lake of true diversity, equity, & inclusion despite agency policies; and

6. The view that Authenticity/Identity/Liberation/ are worth being their true selves for self-preservation, despite the obstacles, challenges, and barriers in the workplace.

The results of this research study are further explored and examined in Chapter Five, providing findings and interpretations of each theme. Chapter Five also provides discussions, implications for practice, and future research on the topic.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Recommendations, Conclusion

Beloved community is formed not by the eradication of difference but by its

affirmation, by each of us claiming the identities and cultural legacies that shape

who we are and how we live in the world.

-bell hooks

The purpose of this study was to understand the impact on the career advancement of Black women in the federal government who choose to wear their hair in its natural textured state. It sought to illustrate Black women's experiences and provide meaning as they navigate their natural hair journey in federal workplaces. This study contributes to the voices of a marginalized group on the paucity of qualitative literature, specifically in the federal government. Participants' varying viewpoints and perspectives provide understanding and posit how structural violence and the intersection of race and gender inform other groups' perspectives of them.

This study contributes to conflict resolution by informing other groups of the experiences of Black women in the Federal government. The articulation of their journeys may help to mitigate the biases, both conscious and unconscious, and decrease discrimination in the workplace. Additionally, participants' viewpoints may provide valuable information in obtaining realistic diversity, equity, and inclusion goals that are both attainable and measurable.

This chapter delineates the following: 1) discussion of findings; 2) recommendations for practice; 3) recommendations for future practice; 4) implications of findings; and 5) conclusion.

The analysis of data offered an emergence of six overall themes. They were as follows: 1) the engagement in respectability politics, 2) subjected to gendered microaggressions, 3) decision to choose health for self-preservation, 4) recognizing the lack of diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace, 5) awareness of financial implications on hair choice, and 6) what is means to be authentic, express identity, and experience the feeling of liberation. These six themes interposed a deeper understanding of how structural violence and intersectionality form experiences of Black women in the workplace.

Theme 1: Respectability Politics

All 15 participants indicated that they engaged in respectability politics. Only one participant knew of the meaning of the term before the study. At the beginning of the interviews, most participants stated they felt comfortable wearing their natural hair. However, participants discussed how they believed certain natural styles appeared neat for the workplace. This way of thinking illustrated how this marginalized group sought to counter any perceived negative representation by a dominant group to seek social acceptance. Black women are constantly navigating society to what are considered social norms by the dominant group. Black women experience anxiety from social norms of the dominant group to straighten their hair, as described in the Perception Institute's study (White, 2018). In the workplace, Black women may have to contend with professionalism and respectability politics, often making real-time decisions for career advancement.

To mitigate any form of discrimination based on gender and race, Black women may feel they have to shift identities to decrease the hypervisibility associated with the

stereotypes associated with Black women (Dickens et al., 2018). Black women could risk the derailment of their careers depending on how they choose to present in the workplace.

While the 1960s and 1970s produced self-awareness and Black pride, the 1980s and 1990s saw Black women gravitating to Eurocentric standards. To achieve these looks, they used relaxers, perms, and Jeri curls. The legacy of acceptance has long plagued Black women since the Transatlantic Slave Trade. This is why it was not unusual for participants to receive comments on their hair by their ethnic group. Those Black women commenting about how participants should wear their hair came from a space of survival. Their comments were unconscious. However, there were a few instances where Black women intentionally made comments to inflict harm on participants by humiliating them. This also came as a survival mechanism to stay in the good graces of the dominant group. This can be dated to colonization where Franz Fanon discusses in his essay, *Decolonizing, National Culture, and the Negro Intellectual*, how Blacks internalize the perception of their own inferiority, as Western culture has Blacks believing they have no culture (1961, as cited in Lemert, 2017). Fanon further posits:

> Like adopted children who only stop investigating their new family environment once their psyche has formed a minimum of core reassurance, the colonized intellectual will endeavor to make European culture his own. Not content with knowing Rabelais or Diderot, Shakespeare or Edgar Allen Poe, he will stretch his mind until he identifies with them completely…(1961, as cited in Lemert, 2017, p. 285).

Some participants felt like their hair was the main topic of conversation and was a distraction. To avoid social injustices, women engaging in respectability politics may think adhering to the influences and the opinions of a dominant group might decrease their chance of punishment regarding job opportunities, work assignments, etc., thus establishing a better lot in society with financial and economic stability. These women's stories correlate with the Dove and LinkedIn 2023 Workplace research study. To acquiesce to social norms, Black women in this study said they changed their hair for job interviews. Either they straightened their hair or wore a wig. The 2023 Dove and LinkedIn quantitative study revealed that 54% of Black women were more likely to feel that they had to straighten their hair in preparation for a job interview.

Although a person may feel that assimilation is key to gaining an advantage, studies have shown little proof that prosecution will cease from a majority group (Ibe, 2022). As Black women attempt to navigate years of oppression, respectability politics is an ineffective coping mechanism. It not only affects Black women. In the scheme of reality, it also affects the BIPOC community, creating division between groups, resulting in a continuation of toxic situations and fostering continued marginalization (Ibe, 2022).

Theme 2: Gendered Microaggressions (Racial)

Analyses of data revealed that all participants were subjected to microaggressions from various racial and ethnic groups, including their own. Various forms of microaggressions were communicated through both conscious and unconscious messages. As previously discussed, microaggressions, a word first coined by Pierre et al., (1978), are those subtle slights and comments that impact groups that have been historically marginalized. Sue et al., (2007) further expanded the taxonomy of racial

microaggression, assuming criminality, intelligence, cultural values, and being treated as second-class citizens. Additionally, Lewis and Neville (2015) defined gendered microaggression as "subtle and everyday verbal, behavioral, and environmental expressions of oppression based on the intersection of one's race and gender.

Some women in this study discussed their experiences with colleagues asking to touch their hair. Participants noted that these requests were not the anomaly. Colleagues would continuously ask questions about their hair, which made them feel uncomfortable. The findings showed the complex working relationships that Black women must negotiate as a survival mechanism. When others asked to touch their hair, they indicated their coworkers were pleasant and did not mean any harm or ill intent. In some respect, Black women said they felt compelled to lean their head over to allow their coworkers to touch their hair, although they felt a sense of being dehumanized and marginalized. Black women wanted to express their discomfort but chose to remain silent and endure the emotional harm. Unknowingly, they were engaging in white fragility. They felt any attempts to discuss their stress were considered fragile conversations and would be unsettling to White people. DiAngelo explains white fragility as follows:

> The smallest amount of racial stress is intolerable-the mere suggestion that being white has meaning often triggers a range of defensive responses. These include emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and withdrawal from the stress-inducing situation. These responses work to reinstate white equilibrium as they repel the challenge, return our racial comfort, and maintain our dominance within the racial hierarchy. . . Though white fragility is triggered by discomfort and anxiety, it is born of superiority and

entitlement. White fragility is not weakness per se. In fact, it is a powerful means

of white racial control and protection of white advantage. (loc. 352)

Another participant explained how she was further marginalized by her white

manager when she was removed from diversity initiatives and made to feel invisible

while a White colleague was provided access and opportunity to work on the same

initiatives she had been removed from. The subtly of natural hairstyle bias may present

significant negative outcomes for Black women in the workplace (Koval & Rosette,

2021). These microaggressions can lead to hair bias discrimination. Mbilishaka et al.

(2020) showed that hair texture was the most common form of hair discrimination. Black

women experience anxiety from social norms of the dominant group to straighten their

hair, as described in the Perception's Institute's study (White, 2018). This finding also

correlates with the Dove and LinkedIn research showing Black women with

coily/textured hair are two times as likely to experience microaggressions in the

workplace than Black women with straighter hair.

Janelle English, who recently stepped down as the Academy's Executive Vice

President for Impact and Inclusion, discussed how she experienced micro- and

macro-aggressions in her short tenure (Rice, 2023). English explained how she was

constantly challenged, both privately and publicly:

I anticipated and grew accustomed to being regularly challenged, publicly and

privately. I felt the pressure of remaining thoughtful, posed, and articulate while

coaching, counseling, and responding to the needs for my colleagues also from

marginalized communities and nursing my own wounds. (Rice, 2023, p. 1)

Theme 3: Health (Physical/Mental)

All participants explained that they transitioned to wearing their natural hair for health reasons. Whether medical health or physical fitness, all indicated it was self-care and well-being. They discussed the damage to their bodies they endured for perceived beauty standards using Eurocentric standards as the median.

Blackshear and Kilmon (2021) conducted a study that examined the impact on Black women and physical fitness when they wore their natural hair. The study revealed that Black women with natural hair styles showed better physical activity and increased self-esteem and hair-esteem. The authors further concluded that wearing natural hair may serve as a catalyst for improved mental and physical health.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has taken the first steps in considering a ban on hair straightening products where a possible rule (Appendix C) was added to the regulatory agenda (Hunter, 2023). This comes after a study conducted by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) with a finding linking the use of hair straightening products to an increased risk of uterine cancer (Hunter, 2023). The study prompted United States representatives, Ayanna Pressley of Massachusetts, and Shontell Brown of Ohio, to request the FDA to investigate hair straightening chemicals further. Representative Pressley stated, "Regardless of how we wear our hair, we should be allowed to show up in the world without putting our health at risk" (Hunter, 2023, p. 1).

Having access to this information is vital in providing Black women with accurate information and resources to make informed decisions about their hair and health. However, despite having this information, it still poses barriers for Black women due to the pressure of societal norms to straighten their hair.

Gultang's structural violence illustrates how physically the use of chemicals may cause harm to the body or maybe even death. However, "psychological violence operates on the soul and is manifested through lies, brainwashing, indoctrination, etc." (Oyedemi, 2016, p. 540). The somatic (physical) implications of damage to the body are evident in the Black hair spectrum. The psychological violence is manifested in the propaganda and indoctrination of what the dominant group perceives as appropriate on a cyclical continuum.

Microaggression may catalyze racial discrimination. It is those everyday subtleties based on the color of one's skin that cannot be changed. However, added to skin color are those other stereotypical identities of Black women that compound the trauma. Studies show that not only is discrimination linked with physical well-being, but also mental health issues (Sima, 2023). It can lead to anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and other mental stressors (Sima, 2023). All of the participants indicated that they were exhausted with the constant invalidation of how they are treated by society. This is a form of how structural racism operates by the status quo or 'this is the way things are' mentality.

Black women, in turn, have learned coping mechanisms to deal with structural violence. Dealing with these types of stressors every day can come at a cost. Negar Fani, an associate professor at Emory University School of Medicine, explained that "long-term racism accelerates aging and degrades key brain circuits involved in regulating emotion and cognition" (Sima, 2023, p. 1). Additionally, Nathaniel Harnett, an assistant professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, said, "This is not an effect of race. It is an effect of the burdens we place on racial groups" (Sima, 2023, p. 1).

Theme 4: Lack of Impactful Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Although participants embrace authenticity and see transitioning from chemical to natural hair as liberating, they all admitted that their agencies have diversity policies, but they saw no impact from those policies. They see it as a check-the-box category, even with President Biden's Executive Order. Some participants expressed that there are programs but see no impact on the diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. Diversity programs are not feel-good initiatives.

An acceleration of diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives emerged after the murder of Mr. George Floyd on March 25, 2020, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, by former White police officer, Derek Chauvin. Many institutions, organizations, states, and federal agencies began implementing training and workshops to address diversity issues. However, these trainings are surface remedies that fail to explore root causes. Jeanell English expressed,

> Like many in this field, I fear performative DEIA positions. For me, these are positions where my Black skin and femininity are of more use to an organization as a form of public relations than my proven leadership and ability to facilitate systemic change. (Rice, 2023, p. 3)

By not exploring root causes, agencies' best efforts may lead to the unintentional consequences of perpetuating systemic patterns of oppression (Coleman et al., 2022). If agencies keep implementing the same structures, they will get the same results. The cycles keep repeating themselves. Research shows that several factors lead to destructive resistance in organizations both on the individual and group levels (Coleman et al., 2022). These individual factors include stereotypes, implicit/explicit biases, ethnocentrism, and

homophily. Group factors consist of bias-confirming information about outsider groups based on perceptions. Agencies must show results and be transparent in how they measure the impact of diversity initiatives.

The researcher made a distinction in describing participants in their profiles. Not all participants were born in this country. However, their experiences with hair discrimination were similar based on the color of their skin and hair texture.

Having Black women suppress their identities by not wearing natural hairstyles may have negative effects, both on Black women and agencies. Being penalized for showing identity may limit the agency's ability to embrace the creativity and different perspectives that a true diversity program offers.

Theme 5: Financial Implications

All except one participant expressed that they felt there were financial implications associated with wearing their hair in natural hairstyles. This participant indicated that since she began wearing her natural hair, she has not applied for other jobs with promotion potential. This research shows that hiring and interview factors may have financial implications through an intersectional lens. Stereotypes of Black women are a major element associated with Black women (Rosette et al., 2012). Stereotypes elucidate Black women as dominate and imperious, which has endured for decades in the United States (Pratt, 2012). Opie and Philips (2015) found, "Black, as compared to White, evaluators gave higher agency penalties to Black employment candidates when they donned Afrocentric versus Eurocentric hair, rating them as more dominant and less professional" (p. 1). Expressing their identity through hair limits their potential to be

hired. Hiring officials may consciously or unconsciously actuate stereotypes that may negatively impact Black women's career advancement and economic sustainability.

Black women's livelihood and their financial well-being are often held in the hands of supervisors and managers who have significant social power just by their privilege alone. Not conforming, being a disruptor, and displaying hypervisibility can have long-term ramifications and financial and professional consequences (Davis, 2018).

Theme 6: Authenticity/Identity/Liberation

The average length of service of participants was 25 years. Some participants discussed comments colleagues would make regarding their choice of hairstyles. Black women have internalized the Eurocentric ideologies that make one perceive textured hair as ugly, and they aspire to have Eurocentric textured hair (Oyedemi, 2016). This internalization has exposed culture and physical violence, thus erasing natural hairstyles (Oyedemi, 2016). This is strongly evident with Black women wearing wigs and hair weaves.

During the civil rights movement, a time of transformation and liberation began to evolve. It was not out of the ordinary for Black women to receive comments expressed by White colleagues as fighting for power based on different political ideologies when they saw Black women wearing an afro. Their assumptions were derived from the Black Pride and Power Movements of the 1960s and 1970s. There was an aesthetic transformation of self-pride, self-affirmation, and internalizing self-awareness, meaning, and understanding about themselves (Garrin & Merketti, 2018). However, when women wear afros, one should not assume that Black women are taking a militant stance, which usually brings to

mind Civil Rights Movement activist, feminist, and icon, Angela Davis. They just may happen to like the hairstyle as part of their identity.

Black women should not have to change their identity to satisfy the Eurocentric standards. Expectations are different for Black women in contrast to White women. For example, Black women and girls have been wearing cornrows, bantu knots, and braids for centuries. These styles have provided cause for court cases. However, when White women wear those same styles, they are celebrated and take credit for starting a new trend. In other words, it is not appropriate until the majority group has appropriated it. The effects of cultural violence on girls at an early age are apparent, with mothers putting chemicals in their hair and wiping out their identity (Oyedemi, 2016). Former First Lady Michelle Obama chose to chemically straighten her hair while in the White House because she felt America was not ready to see a Black woman in braids (Cohen, 2023). Mrs. Obama endured violence throughout her eight years in the White House. It was not until she left that she could embrace her authenticity on her terms.

In the United States, there is a renaissance where Blackness is celebrated; this is apparent through expression in hairstyles. These hairstyles are derived from African ancestors. When the violence is taken away, one lives at their full potential. There is authenticity when women stop using chemicals in their hair. Referring to actress Shalita Grant (discussed in Chapter One), the physical scars begin to disappear as they no longer endured burning and other scalp irritations to the hair. Not caring what others say and deciding never to go back to using chemicals in their hair shows a sign of liberation. None of the participants interviewed said they would return to chemically treated hair.

Limitations

The researcher acknowledges that there are some limitations to this study. The qualitative nature of this study provided in-depth perspectives of a purposive sample of Black women in the federal government. First, even though conducting the semi-structured interviews via a virtual platform proved convenient for participants due to COVID-19 and the convenience of not meeting at the agreed-upon site, this method had some drawbacks. For example, two participants did not turn on their cameras. The researcher missed the opportunity to observe the verbal and nonverbal cues of communication. In using the Labov's structural narrative method, the researcher was not only interested in what participants said but how they said it. Viewing participants on camera would have added additional depth to analyzing Labov's six elements. Ultimately, participants chose comfort and safety to answer questions about their lived experiences.

Second, the researcher could have factored triangulation during the initial stages of the design methodology study. This may have included journaling the researcher's own hair journey, taking field notes, and attending sessions and workshops on the topic. Although triangulation was not incorporated in this study, the researcher utilized quantitative information from the Dove study and the voices of the participants to provide meaning to the empirical data.

This topic is still in its infancy stages. Promising future investigation may include how those societal burdens manifest in Black female government workers and their ability to move forward in their careers using a causation research approach. It may also

lead to further study if there is a correlation between how Black women experience

racism in real-time and their decision-making process as it relates to career trajectories.

Additionally, further investigations may involve a mixed-method approach. This

exploratory work needed to occur to develop a blueprint for future studies.

Recommendations for Practice

Based on data obtained from participants on their experiences and how their race

and gender inform their career growth, several practices would benefit the federal

government in examining innovative practices for review. Those recommendations are as

follows:

Develop Comprehensive Sustainable Diversity Programs

To avoid the pitfalls common to diversity programs, agencies must intentionally

develop programs that measure impact. Intentionality must address how intersectionality

and structural violence impact Black women in the federal government. As previously

mentioned in this study, it is counterproductive to place Black women in the category of

people of color. Taking the opportunity to discuss root causes and including Black

women at the table is a significant strategy to foster inclusion. However, Black women

must not only have a seat at the table, but their input and perceptions of agency culture

and operations must be valued.

Some believe that it is not up to marginalized groups to motivate leadership to

listen to their perspectives for change and fix diversity issues, as the ability to motivate

people is a leadership competency. This is equivalent to asking the oppressed to fix the

oppressor with no resources. Leadership must take the time to be intentional about

understanding racism and its impact on Black women and other marginalized groups.

However, abolitionist, Frederick Douglass, fought against oppression, slavery, and was one of the first practitioners of intersectionality, as he advocated for the rights of women (Goodman & Moynihan, 2017). Douglass said in 1857, "Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will" (Goodman & Moynihan, 2017, p. 1). Douglass believed in standing up for one's self in order to affect change. Feminist, social activist, and journalist, Gloria Steinem stated, "Power can be taken, but not given. The process of taking is empowerment itself." In essence, one cannot be passive in their pursuit of power. One must take action to acquire that power (https://elevatesociety.com/power-can-be-taken-but/).

If Black women are in leadership positions, other leaders at the table must practice attentiveness, intentionality, and understanding for diversity, equity, and inclusion to be impactful. Black hair and texture are social justice issues and should be considered when determining the strategy and implementation of DEI programs (Rowe, 2022).

Diversity programs should not be considered a one-time event or what is currently trending in the business world. Programs must have sustainability power. For example, in ten days, three major Hollywood studios and the Academy Motion Picture of Arts and Sciences either lost or laid off Black DEI executive leadership (Knolle, 2023). Those executives include Disney's Chief Diversity Officer, Latondra Newton, and Netflix's head of Inclusion Strategy, Verná Myers (Knolles, 2023). In addition to Myers and Newton stepping down from their positions, a day after the Supreme Court issued a decision on affirmative action in higher education, Warner Brothers Discovery laid off Senior Vice President of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, Karen Horne, as well as the

Academy relieving Executive Vice President of Impact and Inclusion, Jeanell English of her duties.

To avoid pitfalls with agency diversity programs, agencies must be strategic when they develop policies. This is an opportunity to incorporate the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), which consist of 17 interlinking objectives that all 193 UN countries agreed to as a universal call to protect the planet by 2030, allowing people to enjoy peace and prosperity (Appendix). Several goals can be identified to incorporate in achieving a sustainable organizational diversity program. They are:

- No poverty (Goal 1)

- Good Health and Well-Being (Goal 3);

- Quality Education (Goal, 4) ;

- Gender Equality (Goal, 5);

- Decent Work and Economic Growth (Goal, 8);

- Reduced Inequalities (Goal, 10); and

- Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions (Goal, 16)

This is an opportunity to become social agencies of diversity driving social impact and changing behaviors, eliminating those systemic barriers that have long hindered marginalized groups.

Utilize Strategic and Collaborative Approaches in Mitigating Discrimination Complaints

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) requires all federal agencies to submit reports that show accountability of complaints and routine

assessments of barriers. The Management Directive (MD) – 715 provides a snapshot of an agency based on race and disability. The MD-715 illustrates careers and grade levels compared to the CLF. With access to those statistics, agencies can determine any barriers that prevent equal employment opportunities and provide approaches to eliminate those barriers. In addressing the triggers that cause the barriers, agencies must fully encompass all forms of complaint platforms through collaboration. These platforms may include the negotiated and administrative grievance processes and capturing data from exit interviews and employee viewpoint surveys. The MD-715 is a starting point. It should not be used as a check-the-box report that is marked completed.

EEO offices should apply the appropriate theories of discrimination to effectively frame claims of Black women that illustrate their multiple identities in the complaint process. Intersectionality must be addressed and applied appropriately when women use race and gender as bases of discrimination. Hair discrimination and textures should be a conversation in the complaint process (Asare, 2023).

Be Open to Engaging in Difficult Conversations

Agencies must be open to engaging in difficult conversations that specifically address Black women and racism. Sometimes, agencies need a jolt or scandal to begin the process of thinking and engaging differently (Coleman et al., 2022). Employees must feel psychologically safe to express their experiences. It is recommended to be mindful of keeping Black women's experiences centered as the topic of conversation and not let other groups monopolize the conversations. The objective is to gain an understanding of their experiences in the workplace. While these conversations may be uncomfortable,

they are a step closer to addressing the root causes of issues that are pervasive in agencies.

Conduct Review of Agency Policies

Diversity officers should conduct periodic reviews to ensure systems show objectivity (Asare, 2023). Participants indicated that they did not have any formal policies on appearance. However, there were undertones of how one should present in the workplace. Some referred to wearing hairstyles as appearing neat or professional. Professionalism is a racial construction and must be reviewed at various iterations to ensure there is no indirect violence or discrimination.

Health and Wellbeing

The relevant bodies should conduct training on the negative health implications of hair straightening products and discuss the positive health benefits of natural hairstyles on healthy lifestyle changes. Policy changes should be based on the latest and relevant data that address Black women's hair choices. Policymakers must be well-informed through current research and continued education in this evolving social structure, emphasizing the impact on this marginalized group. Creating a platform of cultural competencies is key to ensuring consideration of cultural diversity is intentional in the workplace.

Recommendation for Future Research

The result of this study has expanded the qualitative literature on perceptions of natural hair of Black women in the federal government. A government-wide study can be conducted using a mixed-methods approach. The Dove study was conducted within the private sector. Using the Dove study as a baseline, a federal government study can be specifically designed for Black women in the federal sector. The federal government

conducts several surveys throughout the year. This study can solicit volunteers to participate anonymously through surveys and focus groups to develop cultural competencies for the federal sector. There may be a need to expand the intersections to determine if other identities emerge (Moorosi et al., 2018).

Implications of Findings

This study's findings will heighten and develop scholarship on the convergence of structural violence and gender and race based on the experiences of Black women in the federal workplace and their natural hair. This study offers a platform for the voices of a group that has been historically marginalized to be heard. This study is significant because it provides accounts of barriers and obstacles of federally employed Black women who choose to wear their hair in its natural state. It provides agency leadership, managers, supervisors, and colleagues with an understanding of Black women's experiences and the intended and or unintended consequences of their choice to express their authenticity. To grow a diverse population and make the federal government a preferred employer of choice, it must address race and gender issues with intentional and robust initiatives that provide a work environment that exemplifies a model employer.

Additionally, another significant factor of this study provides the need to address the subtleties of gendered microaggressions, both unconscious and conscious, that contribute to discrimination complaints. Developing effective policies and conflict resolution strategies will help underrepresented groups reach their potential in the federal workforce.

Contributions to the Field of Conflict Analysis and Resolution

It is important to create psychologically safe spaces for Black women to feel comfortable discussing their issues and concerns. Out of that dialogue, the creation of new and intentional policies can eliminate barriers allowing black women to meet their full potential. Black hair can be a point of entry to begin thought-provoking conversations and critical analyses about the impact on Black women's identities and culture and expressing their authenticity to invigorate the healing process of breaking down the social constructs of racism.

Black women in conflict resolution roles must also feel safe. Agencies must be cognizant of the diversity in mediators, facilitators, and conflict coaches at the agency. Many conflict resolution professionals are members of the BIPOC community. If one or more of the parties are from the dominant group, the conflict resolution professional must be strategic in identifying power structures and hierarchy perceptions during the discussions. Agencies must grant reasonable time to allow the process to develop in an organic and realistic flow. This can be accomplished by avoiding conflict resolution constraints on the process. For example, if mediation is to take place and management sets a time limit constraint of two hours, that may not be a realistic amount of time to resolve a workplace dispute. Conflicts do not manifest in two hours. Therefore, agencies should not hold conflict resolution professionals to unrealistic standards in resolving workplace conflicts.

It is imperative to ensure that conflict resolution practitioners are adequately trained in conflict theories that better help understand black women's perspectives when they file complaints. Conducting an analysis of conflict and determining appropriate

practices to utilize requires insight into theories, research, and practices. Also, understanding theory helps provide epistemological approaches in understanding their narratives–using coaching techniques to ask probative questions. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) has introduced intersectionality as a theory of discrimination where discrimination arises from the intersection of two or more protected bases, such as gender and race. For example: How will managers perceive Black women with natural hairstyles? Have agencies provided quality training emphasizing the impact unconscious or conscious decisions of have on these women?

Artificial intelligence (AI) poses another form of disquiet during the interview process, as some federal agencies are starting to pilot more complex AI systems. Machines are not neutral. There are numerous accounts where research illustrates racial and gender bias in AI systems. Buolamwini (2019) put it into context, "When people's lives, livelihoods, and dignity are on the line, AI must be developed and deployed with care and oversight" (p. 2). Only a small portion of the world has been able to truly benefit from AI. This is because of the lack of broad representation in the areas of AI development, design, implementation, and governance (Buolamwini, 2019).

Recruiters must be cognizant of biases, which is a first step in economic stability. Buolamwini (2019) also discussed how only 2% of Black employees at Google and Facebook were employed in technical positions. Black women must be fully included as much as possible in sample sizes that engage in storytelling, linking art and science. These women must be at the table and valued in the conversation. Black women can lend to research and design in AI where often important factors might otherwise be overlooked, as a majority of perspectives are coming from heterosexual White men.

There is still work to be done. One participant explained that even though she wore her hair in a natural style, she knew the panel was smart enough not to mention her hair. Those slights are not covered under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, yet Black women are still being harmed by this violence.

Conclusion

This is a relatively new topic in the federal government. There was a paucity of literature related to the federal government on this topic. These women voiced their experiences on how believing they must assimilate to the dominant group's perceptions leads to their inability to present as their authentic selves. Black women are constantly on a balance beam when wearing their hair in a textured hairstyle, in fear of the hypervisibility it places on them in the workplace. They provided examples of the harms caused by oppression, financial implications, and lack of the dominant group's understanding of issues important to them.

Being authentic expresses self-worth in one's inner soul and not having a problem expressing one's viewpoints, beliefs, feelings, etc. One does not have to be Black, female, or have certain textured hair to be an ally. An example is John Paul DeJoria of John Paul Mitchell Systems. DeJoria knew early on that the future of hair was not going to be about race but hair texture (Byrd & Tharps, 2014). To illustrate his prediction, Dejoria not only invested but also joined the board of TextureMedia. TextureMedia owns NaturallyCurly.com, CurlyNikki.com, and CurlMart.com. TextureMedia is owned by a White woman.

This study determined that conflicts and barriers exist in the federal government as Black women navigate their careers in the federal workplace. The federal government

must be intentional in ensuring Black women are protected and free from discrimination. What can federal agencies do to mitigate the conflicts and barriers that Black woman face in being their authentic self? Will federal courts see the signs of the times and implement legislation addressing the various intersections of Black women instead of analyzing their issues on a single axis, or will Congress pass legislation protecting women and natural hairstyles? Federal agencies can do their part in being socially responsible to humanity without legislation.

The six themes overlap and are intertwined in the experiences of the participants. Just as Black women cannot be analyzed on a single axis, this study illustrates how the themes intertwined and are viewed holistically. One theme cannot be discussed without incorporating aspects of another theme. The participants were bold and proud to tell their stories for this study.

Storytelling is a powerful tool. It has the power to shift perspectives in understanding impacts on individuals and groups. Storytelling can lead to policy change and challenge those perceived stereotypes that ultimately inflict hate on societies for decades to come. Storytelling is a form of art, and it captures what quantitative data cannot accomplish. Individuals tell stories through their lived experiences. Incorporating lived experiences can accomplish several objectives for federal agencies to consider. They may include the following:

1. Incorporate lived experience perspectives in support of agency's strategic initiatives;

2. Advise leadership on broad, complex, and sensitive policy issues encompassing lived experience perspectives;

3. Be intentional in ensuring that lived experiences and perspectives of groups that have been historically marginalized are well-thought-out when reviewing policy communication and program evaluation;

4. Collaborate with internal and external stakeholders on diversity and outreach initiatives related to policy and programs while integrating lived experience perspectives;

5. Incorporate lived experience perspectives to mitigate organizational conflict, engage in consensus building, and begin the process of implementing sustained facilitated dialogue; and

6. Ensure lived experiences and perspectives are in alignment with organizational goals, guidelines, and intended objectives.

Beauty is not an aesthetic that Black women must seek to become. Black women were born beautiful, just as every other human being. Black women should not have to neutralize their uniqueness to confirm. In doing so, one is reduced to mediocrity. Federal agencies should evaluate their professional standards, both written and unwritten, and how they impact those groups that have been historically marginalized based on their social identity. This is one step closer to hope in obtaining an inclusive workforce.

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Appendix A

NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY
Institutional Review Board

MEMORANDUM

To: Darnella McGuire-Nelson
           Halmos College of Arts and Sciences

From: Deanne Roopnarine, D.P.M.
           College Representative, Halmos College of Arts and Sciences

Date: August 6, 2021

Subject: IRB Exempt Initial Approval Memo

TITLE: Why is My Hair Micromanaged in the Workplace?
Black Women and Natural Hairstyles in the Federal Government— NSU IRB Protocol Number
           2021-350

Dear Principal Investigator,

Your submission has been reviewed and Exempted by your IRB College Representative or their
Alternate on **July 28, 2021**. You may proceed with your study.

*Please Note: Exempt studies do not require approval stamped documents. If your study site
requires stamped copies of consent forms, recruiting materials, etc., contact the IRB Office.*

Level of Review: Exempt

Type of Approval: Initial Approval

Exempt Review Category: Exempt 2: Interviews, surveys, focus groups, observations of public
behavior, and other similar methodologies

Post-Approval Monitoring: The IRB Office conducts post-approval review and monitoring of all
studies involving human participants under the purview of the NSU IRB. The Post-Approval
Monitor may randomly select any active study for a Not-for-Cause Evaluation.

Annual Status of Research Update: You are required to notify the IRB Office annually if your research study is still ongoing via the *Exempt Research Status Update xForm*.

Final Report: You are required to notify the IRB Office within 30 days of the conclusion of the research that the study has ended using the *Exempt Research Status Update xForm*.

Translated Documents: No

Please retain this document in your IRB correspondence file.

CC: Deanne Roopnarine, D.P.M.

        mary hope schwoebel

Appendix B

Recruitment for Research Study
Why is My Hair Micromanaged in the Workplace?
Black Women and Natural Hairstyles in the Federal Government

Are you a Black woman who works in the Federal Government that wears her hair in its natural textured state (i.e., afro, twist, twist out, locs, etc.)?

If so, would you be willing to participate in a confidential research study that seeks to understand the Black women's narrative in the federal government in maintaining authenticity as it relates to wearing one's hair in its natural textured state.

My name is Darnella McGuire-Nelson, and I am candidate for Ph.D. at Nova Southeastern University (Halmos College of Arts and Sciences) in Fort Lauderdale, FL. The purpose of this narrative study will be to understand the impact on career advancement of Black women in the federal government who choose to wear their hair in its natural textured state.

Your voluntary participation in this study will assist in determining if Black women's hair is micromanaged in the Federal Government, and if Black women who wear their hair in its natural textured state face barriers and/or conflicts in advancing their careers.

Currently, there is little to no research on the plight of the Black women and natural hair in the Federal Government. As such, completing the study will lend to existing quantitative studies with a focus specifically on Black women in the Federal Government.

Participants
- Identifies as a Black woman
- Works in Federal Government with at least 3 years minimum.
- Works in Washington metropolitan area, Consisting of District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virgina (DMV)
- Grades GS-12 to Senior Executive level positions
- Currently wears hair in natural textured state.

Participation Environment
- Research participants completes a pre-screening questionnaire to determine if inclusion criteria is met and consent to participate in study;
- Participant may withdraw from the study at any time;
- Research participant participates in a confidential one-time 60-90 minute interview;
- Due to Covid-19 all interviews will be conducted using a virtual platform to ensure social distancing; and
- After completion of interview, participants will be provided a $20 Target gift card.

If you meet the criteria and are interested in participating in this study, please contact me at the following:

Darnella McGuire-Nelson
dm2293@mynsu.nova.edu

WHY IS MY HAIR MICOMANAGED IN THE WORKPLACE?

BLACK WOMEN AND NATURAL HAIRSTYLES IN THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

PRE-SCREENING SURVEY

Name

Do you identify as a Black woman? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Have you been employed in Federal Government for at least three years? ☐ Yes ☐ No
    If checked yes, indicate length of service. _____

What is your grade? ☐ GS-12 ☐ GS-13 ☐ GS-14 ☐ GS-15 ☐ SES ☐ Other

Do you wear your hair in its natural textured state? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Have you ever straightened or used chemicals on your hair? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Do you work within the Washington metropolitan commuting area? ☐ Yes ☐ No

What Agency are you employed?
☐ Department of Veterans Affairs
☐ Department of Agriculture
☐ Department of Commerce
☐ Department of Defense
☐ Department of Treasury
☐ Department of Health and Human Services
☐ Department of Housing and Urban Development
☐ Department of State
☐ Department of Interior
☐ Department of Justice
☐ Department of Transportation
☐ Department of Labor
☐ Department of Energy
☐ Department of Education
☐ Department of Homeland Security
☐ Other_____

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General Informed Consent Form
NSU Consent to be in a Research Study Entitled
Why is My Hair Micro-managed in the Workplace?
Black Women and Natural Hairstyles in the Federal Government

Who is doing this research study?

College: Halmos College of Arts and Sciences

Principal Investigator: Darnella B. McGuire-Nelson

Faculty Advisor/Dissertation Chair: Mary Hope Schwoebel, Ph.D.

Co-Investigator(s): N/A

Site Information: Due to COVID-19, all interviews will be conducted via a virtual platform. If the participant request an in-person interview and social distancing is permitted, the in-person interview will take place at the following location:

C & C Hair Studio
1114 Queen Street
Alexandria, VA 22314

Funding: Unfunded

What is this study about?

This is a research study, designed to test and create new ideas that other people can use in addressing issues that involve Black women and gender issues around hair. The purpose of this research study is to understand the impact on career advancement of Black women in the federal government who choose to wear their hair in its natural textured state. The significance of this study is to determine if a conflict exist. If it is determined that a conflict exist, then what can federal agencies do to mitigate the conflicts and barriers that Black woman face. Will Federal courts see the sign of the times and implement legislation that addresses the various intersections of Black women instead of analyzing their issues on a single axis? Natural or textured hair refers to Black women's hair that is not processed or straightened, but left in its original state. Some people call this relaxer-free, chemical-free, or perm-free. Information obtained from this study will allow the researcher to recommend a conflict resolution practice aimed at the inclusion of non-traditional perspectives in changing the environment of how Black women are perceived in the federal workplace, as Black women should feel free to be their authentic self in the workplace.

Why are you asking me to be in this research study?

You are being asked to be in this research study because you may process knowledge that will lend to the understanding of barriers and challenges that Black women face in the Federal Government when wearing their hair in its natural state. The research may show that policies, micro-aggressions, and

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unconscious biases may have an impact on Black women's growth, promotion, and economic sustainability in the federal workforce. The inability for Black women to reach their promotion potential has a direct link with retirement and maintaining the quality of life that all deserve.

This study will include about 15 people.

What will I be doing if I agree to be in this research study?

The purpose of this narrative study will be to understand the impact on career advancement of Black women in the federal government who choose to wear their hair in its natural textured state.

While you are taking part in this research study, you will be required to participate in one interview from 60 to 90 minutes. The Research Study Procedures - as a participant, this is what you will be doing:

First the PI will schedule a one-time 60-90 minute interview with you, after the conducting the pre-screening process. The prescreening process includes an assessment conducted by the PI that addresses a series of initial questions to ensure you meet the criteria. This one-time interview will be conducted via Zoom virtual platform. As a participant you must meet the following criteria:
1) Identifies as a Black woman;
2) Employed by Federal Government for 3 or more years;
3) Wear hair in natural, textured state;
4) Previously straightened or used chemicals on hair;
5) Works in the Washington metropolitan commuting area (District of Columbia, Maryland, & Virginia);
6) Works at a cabinet level agency; and
7) Employed at GS-12 or above

Due to Covid-19, your interview will be conducted via a virtual platform unless you specifically request a face-to-face interview. If determined that risk of transmission is low, PI will coordinate with C & C Hair Studio for the interview to be conducted at the designated salon. PI has obtained permission to use facility if such a request is made by the participant. C & C Hair Studio is located at 1114 Queen Street, Alexandria, VA 22314.

Next, during the interviews, PI will use Zoom to record the interview, which will be uploaded to a transcription service that is compatible with Zoom. Please note, PI has purchased a subscription to Zoom to ensure protection, security, and confidentiality for you as the participant. In the event that you experience some form of trauma, a psychologist will be on standby during all scheduled meetings to address any issues that PI is not equipped to address. Dr. Tiffany Rice has agreed to provide her services for this research study. Dr. Rice can be reached at (443) 760-0015. The interview will be password protected, both the Zoom and transcription files. The PI will store the laptop in a fire retardant safe at her home located at 3820 Woodlawn Court, Alexandria, VA 22304.

Upon completion of each interview, it will me transcribed within 24-48 hours for further analysis. Transcripts and audio will be password protected and the laptop will be stored in a fire retardant safe when not in use.

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Are there possible risks and discomforts to me?

This research study involves minimal risk to you. To the best of our knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm than you would have in everyday life.

What happens if I do not want to be in this research study?
You have the right to leave this research study at any time, or not be in it. If you do decide to leave or you decide not to be in the study anymore, you will not get any penalty or lose any services you have a right to get. If you choose to stop being in the study, any information collected about you **before** the date you leave the study will be kept in the research records for 36 months from the end of the study but you may request that it not be used.

What if there is new information learned during the study that may affect my decision to remain in the study?
If significant new information relating to the study becomes available, which may relate to whether you want to remain in this study, this information will be given to you by the investigator. You may be asked to sign a new Informed Consent Form if the information is given to you after you have joined the study.

Are there any benefits for taking part in this research study?

There are no direct benefits from being in this research study. We hope the information learned from this study will pl provide awareness in cultural diversity and lead to laws that will protect the humanity and dignity of Black women with regards to natural hair.

Will I be paid or be given compensation for being in the study?

Participants will receive a $20 Target gift card after completing the one-time interview.

Will it cost me anything?

There are no costs to you for being in this research study.

How will you keep my information private?

Information we learn about you in this research study will be handled in a confidential manner, within the limits of the law and will be limited to people who have a need to review this information. The participant's name will not be used, instead will be given a pseudonym. The interview will be password protected, both the Zoom and transcription files. This data will be available to the researcher, the Institutional Review Board and other representatives of this institution, and any regulatory and granting agencies (if applicable). If we publish the results of the study in a scientific journal or book, we will not identify you. All confidential data will be kept securely. The PI will store the laptop in a fire retardant safe at her home located at 3820 Woodlawn Court, Alexandria, VA 22304.. All data will be kept for 36 months from the end of the study and destroyed after that time by deleting all files from database.

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Will there be any Audio or Video Recording?

This research study involves audio and/or video recording. This recording will be available to the researcher, the Institutional Review Board, and other representatives of this institution. The recording will be kept, stored, and destroyed as stated in the section above. Because what is in the recording could be used to find out that it is you, it is not possible to be sure that the recording will always be kept confidential. The researcher will try to keep anyone not working on the research from listening to or viewing the recording.

Whom can I contact if I have questions, concerns, comments, or complaints?

If you have questions, feel free to ask them now. I can be reached at dm2293@mynsu.nova.edu or (703) 795-0452, between 5:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m. daily. If you have more questions about your rights as a participant or have a research-related inquiry, please contact the email and number provided below.

Research Participants Rights

For questions/concerns regarding your research rights, please contact:

Institutional Review Board
Nova Southeastern University
(954) 262-5369 / Toll Free: 1-866-499-0790
IRB@nova.edu

You may also visit the NSU IRB website at www.nova.edu/irb/information-for-research-participants for further information regarding your rights as a research participant.

Consent

I have read this form and the research study has been explained to me. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and my questions were answered. If I have additional questions, I have been told who to contact. I agree to participate in this research study described above and will receive a copy of this consent form.

All space below was intentionally left blank.

_____

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INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
3301 College Avenue
Fort Lauderdale, Florida 33314-7796
PHONE: (954) 262-5369

Research Consent & Authorization Signature Section

Voluntary Participation - You are not required to participate in this study. In the event you do participate, you may leave this research study at any time. If you leave this research study before it is completed, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits to which you are entitled.

If you agree to participate in this research study, sign this section. You will be given a signed copy of this form to keep. You do not waive any of your legal rights by signing this form.

Adult Signature Section

I have voluntarily decided to take part in this research study.

Printed Name of Participant	Signature of Participant	Date

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent and Authorization	Signature of Person Obtaining Consent & Authorization	Date

---

SIGN THIS FORM ONLY IF THE STATEMENTS LISTED BELOW ARE TRUE:
- You have read the above information.
- Your questions have been answered to your satisfaction about the research

Appendix C: Resources

The CROWN Act

https://www.thecrownact.com/

Food and Drug Administration

https://www.reginfo.gov/public/do/eAgendaViewRule?pubId=202304&RIN=0910-AI83

National Institutes of Health

https://tools.niehs.nih.gov/newsreleases/index.cfm/detail/946451