ADDRESSING SALON SEGREGATION: STRUCTURAL RACISM IN THE SALON INDUSTRY

by

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1. Introduction

1.1 Motivation

I have been a licensed cosmetologist working behind the chair in salons since 1997. I graduated from cosmetology in 1996 without ever touching a Black person's hair or even a textured hair mannequin. The cosmetology school I went to didn't have a lot of Black customers (I can recall exactly none getting hair services while I was there) no Black instructors, and very few Black students. After school, I never bothered to fill the gap in my education on my own, and none of my salon jobs attracted more than a handful of Black clients, so the owners weren't incentivized to offer textured hair education either. I did my best to work with the differently textured hair of the Black clients who sat in my chair, but in reality, I was making educated guesses at best, and likely causing some harm to hair and psyche at worst.

Mine is not a unique story. Due to practices of segregation, exclusion, and omission in salon education and practices, many stylists lack experience and training related to textured and Black hairstyles. The goal of this dissertation is to examine how this gap in knowledge and lack of diversity and inclusion in the cosmetology industry affects the lives and experiences of Black individuals. Specifically, I claim that the segregated nature of salons is harmful to Black individuals and is the result of deliberate and structural processes that are aimed at these specific kinds of harms, and as such, is something that should be corrected.

This introductory chapter will introduce my motivations for taking on this project, establish that the cosmetology industry *is* segregated, present some other relevant background information, and make the case that for Black Americans especially, hair isn't "just hair," but rather holds special significance. In Chapter 2, I'll respond to one common argument against the idea that this segregation is the kind of thing that needs to be corrected. Specifically, the argument that it is the result of naturalness or human nature. I will show that on the contrary, this

segregation is not at all natural, but rather it is the result of social processes, and in particular, the social processes that constitute deliberate structural racism and racist policies.

Even if it *were* natural, this particular kind of segregation turns out to be correlated with or in a causal relationship with harms and injustices done to Black people. We know this because Black people experiencing segregated salon spaces say there is harm. Chapter 3 will lay out the epistemological methodology employed in the rest of the dissertation. Chapter 4 is a discussion of testimonies from Black people who have experienced segregated salon spaces and the harm caused by such segregation. I argue that we should believe that testimony to avoid further harm, in particular the epistemic harms of contributory injustice. Chapter 5 is a discussion of some preliminary solutions to the segregated nature of the salon industry, some ways to mitigate harms that result from the segregation, and some potential pitfalls to be avoided in the course of implementing solutions.

1.2 Definitional and Organizational Premises

For the purposes of this dissertation, I'll use the term White salon to refer to those salon spaces that primarily cater to a White clientele, are operated by a predominantly White staff, and offer services, techniques, and styles that are usually most popular with White customers. Black salons, then, are those salon spaces that primarily cater to a Black clientele, are operated by a primarily Black staff, and offer services, techniques, and styles that are usually most popular with Black customers. There are obviously salon spaces that fall in between these two extremes, and that can cater to all demographics and hair textures, but based on both my own experience in the industry and the difficulties people of color describe in finding a salon space like this, it seems like many salons are one or the other. I believe that focusing on the two ends of the spectrum captures the general makeup of most salon spaces in the US, and as such, will be an acceptable and helpful way to generalize for this project. I have also adopted the practice of capitalizing the term "White" when it refers to White people as they participate in, benefit from,

perpetuate, or are the cause of racism and racist practices. Capitalizing "White" serves to disrupt the historical tendency for white Americans to exist in a realm of invisibility, seemingly detached from racial categorization, or as the default. By capitalizing "White," I intend to draw attention to "Whiteness" as not merely a neutral descriptor, but as a system of power and privilege, which is particularly relevant to the discussions to come in this project.

Throughout this project, I employ the term “salon space” to refer to salons, barbershops, and cosmetology schools as if they were all the same type of thing. I chose this convention because salons did not become segregated on their own. Mainstream cosmetology schools in the US and UK predominantly focus on teaching styling techniques for silky and straight hair textures. This educational bias means that professionals trained in these institutions are often not equipped to work with textured or curly hair. Those seeking training in textured hair techniques usually turn to alternative, non-mainstream schools or acquire their skills through informal channels such as apprenticeships, online education, or community-based training programs. This educational divide perpetuates a de facto segregation in the salon industry, as stylists are often only prepared to serve clients whose hair types were covered in formal training. Thus, the mainstream focus on silky and straight hair not only fosters a widespread lack of competency in textured hair care among trained stylists but also leads to a racially segregated industry where services are effectively divided along racial lines.[1] Michelle O’Connor, the artistic director for Matrix and creative director for the Salon by Instyle, explains salon segregation as “Black and brown women going to salons that cater to this hair type specifically, a Black salon.” She told HuffPost that racial bias in the salon “starts with and ends with the beauty professional,” but adds that cosmetology school is complicit in the bias” (Di Donato). Given that salons, barbershops, and cosmetology schools all play a part in the segregation of the industry

[1] Marsh, Natasha. *Could 2021 Be the Year That Hairstylists Are Required to Be Well-Versed in Textured Hair?* November 17, 2020, Lord, Jennifer. Textured Education Now, Khan, Aina J., Brinkhurst-Cuff. *U.K. Salon Industry Long Underserved Black Clients. It’s Vowing to Change That*. Aug. 11, 2021

as a whole, for this project, I will generally use ‘salon space” to refer to cosmetology school and salon/barbershop spaces, as they are intrinsically linked in that practitioners are applying what they learn in school to their patrons in the salon, and both spaces often expose individuals to similar types of harms.

A substantial portion of this dissertation is dedicated to exploring the history of haircare in the United States, a critical examination that lays the foundation for understanding the current landscape of salon segregation. This historical exploration is not merely anecdotal but is essential for grasping the persistent issues that underpin the salon industry. By tracing the evolution of haircare practices and policies, we can discern the roots of segregation in salons and the social, economic, institutional, and cultural dimensions that sustain it. This background is crucial for articulating the subsequent argument that salon segregation results in significant harms—harms that are not only pervasive but also sufficiently severe to warrant remedial action. The historical context provided will illuminate why these harms are not isolated incidents but are embedded in broader societal systemic structures and norms, thereby emphasizing the urgency and necessity of addressing these injustices.

1.3 The Beauty Industry is Segregated

In the United States, the beauty industry still tends to be unofficially segregated by race in a way that many other retail and service industries no longer are. Salons often operate on racially segregated lines, and retail environments mirror this division, segregating haircare products by race both in physical placement and availability. Furthermore, the foundational education provided in cosmetology schools frequently overlooks textured hair, leading to a workforce ill-prepared to meet the needs of a racially diverse clientele.

Salons in the U.S. remain largely racially segregated, a situation influenced by stylists' unfamiliarity with certain hair types, particularly the textured hair that most often grows on the heads of Black individuals. This segregation is, of course, not official but occurs in practice,

where Black clients are often redirected to Black-owned salons or outright refused service based on their hair type. This practice is brought to light by a broader societal focus on racial issues, evidenced by media and public discourse. The bump in media attention that the Black Lives Matter movement has received since 2020 has spilled over into attention toward other kinds of racism and discrimination in the United States such as in the TV and film industries, advertising media, as well as beauty and hair industries. Popular content curators and authors are publishing pieces with titles like “Dear Drugstores—Please Stop Segregating Your Haircare Products" (Marsh), “Separate But Not Equal: Racial Bias In Salon Culture” (Di Dinato), and “Hair Salons Are Still One of the Most Segregated Spaces in America" (Starks), just to name a few.[2] One piece by an anonymous Black salon director discloses that at the salon she manages, all Black potential clients are sent to the Black-owned salon down the street, regardless of hair texture. The salon has Black stylists but no Black clientele because no stylist there knows how to work with Black hair (Anonymous 2020). A family in Westborough Massachusetts who sent their three children ages 7, 5, and 2 years to a salon for haircuts were told by an employee that they should have mentioned that the children were Black when they made the appointment because "they do not cut Black people's hair" (Italie). Columnist Natasha Marsh describes her experience growing up in a predominately White area and having to ask any salon she called if they could work with her hair texture, but being disappointed when she arrived and was either turned away for failing to make clear that she had “ethnic” hair or treated to a terrible experience by a hairstylist who didn’t know how to work with her hair and wouldn't just say so (Marsh). Editorial articles and interviews are not the only indication that the industry has long had a segregation problem, however, even the language we use to talk about salons, hair stylists, and hair in general in the United States seems to point to a racial divide. Do a quick Google search for “salons near me” and you will see in the related search terms section something along the lines of “Black salons near me,” or “Black walk-in salons near me.” Similarly, searching just the

[2] See also: Starks, Khan, Mroczkowski, Borgman, Dalton, Anon 2021, Neal, Marsh, Booker.

term “Black salon” or “Black cosmetology school returns pages of hits referring to both salons and schools as “Black” or “White.” Searching for “Black salon” on Reddit returns pages of posts in which people ask about things like the etiquette of being a White patron of a Black salon, whether or not the Black readers of Reddit would be willing to visit a White salon, or information on whether White salons will take Black clients and/or if White stylists can do Black hair, and vice versa. These are just a few examples of the ways in which we talk about hair salons, the hair itself, and the technicians who work with that hair as segregated by race, and in the case of big box retail, haircare products are also separated by race.

The beauty aisle in many retail spaces not only reflects a literal segregation in product placement but also a figurative one in how beauty norms are established, with "White" hair care often presented as the default. Even though hair texture varies among all races and some hair care needs are universal, the distinction in product marketing and placement in retail stores starkly segregates Black haircare. Retail shelves are often dominated by brands that do not cater to textured or Black haircare needs, and when Black beauty brands are available, they are frequently out of stock or poorly placed on shelves. Until recently, in most big box retail stores, one could observe a clear division: there was often a section labeled 'beauty' or 'haircare,' primarily stocked with products catering to White consumers with silky or straight hair textures, and a distinctly separate 'ethnic' section aimed at non-White customers, featuring products for textured or curly hair (Byrd and Tharps 227; Perkins; Booker). This layout often leaves Black consumers struggling to find suitable products for their melanated skin and/or textured hair within the main 'beauty' aisles, reinforcing a racial divide in haircare and beauty product accessibility. In 2021 McKinsey and Co. found that of the 110 Black consumers surveyed, seventy-three percent reported that Black beauty products were often out of stock when they went to buy them, and fifty-four percent said that when they *were* in stock, they were hard to find (Baboolall et al.). The segregation and limited availability of Black haircare products in retail stores have perpetuated racial stereotypes and created a hostile shopping environment for

Black consumers. This is exacerbated by a practice that was common up until around 2020. Many retail chains like Walmart, CVS, and other big box retailers kept Black beauty products locked up in cases, requiring those interested in making a purchase to find someone and ask to be allowed to examine the product or put it in their cart. In 2018 shopper Essie Grundy filed a federal lawsuit against Walmart, alleging racial discrimination and violation of civil rights. Walmart's previous practice was to keep Black beauty products in locked glass cases, while similar products not aimed specifically at Black consumers were kept readily accessible on the shelves. Grundy argues that this practice perpetuates racial stereotypes and creates a hostile shopping environment for African-American customers, and said that “shame and humiliation…as though people viewed her as a criminal” (Dwyer). Regardless of whether or not the products are kept locked up, the practice of separating them by race not only undermines the ability to meet the diverse needs and textures of Black hair but also reinforces societal expectations of beauty by perpetuating Whiteness as the default. In addition to the challenges faced by Black consumers in accessing suitable hair care products, the issue of segregation also extends to the education and training received by cosmetology students.

The educational deficiencies within cosmetology training contribute to these segregation issues. Though there is often more diversity within cosmetology student bodies than in salon staff and clientele, the standard cosmetology school curricula remain largely focused on silky, straight-textured hair. Prior to revisions in 2013, textured hair care was not specifically taught in either of the two leading cosmetology textbooks (Marsh). Where very coily or kinky hair was mentioned, the coverage was often superficial, and there was a lack of in-depth information on the unique needs and styling techniques for textured hair. Cosmetology schools focus mainly on preparing the student for taking the required state board examination and teaching the fundamentals of cosmetology. Even now, with the 2013 addition of a chapter which is dedicated to textured hair education, students complain that the chapter is often only touched on, or sometimes skipped altogether due either to educators not having the knowledge themselves or

to the schools not requiring the chapter be actually taught (Lord). “It is possible to have a cosmetology license without ever touching a Black head” (Italie). Students who want to learn to work on textured hair have to seek out a Black cosmetology school, or additional training to learn the skills they desire (Donoto; Starks; Mroczkowski; Borgman). Since most cosmetology schools are designed to teach just the very basics and to set students up to pass their state exams, until state exams require students to show textured hair skills, schools will have little incentive to teach them. As of 2023, only Louisiana requires that state licensure applicants demonstrate textured hair competency, and even then, the requirement is for haircutting competency only (Wilkinson). The underrepresentation of textured hair education reinforces systemic inequalities within the cosmetology profession. Even in Black-owned or textured hair-focused cosmetology schools, students are often trained primarily in techniques to straighten and reduce the texture of curly and coily hair as opposed to caring for textured hair in its natural state (Borgman, Valenti). Graduates of such schools may still be less equipped to meet the diverse needs of clients with textured hair who seek services that celebrate and enhance their natural curls and coils. This gap in training may also further perpetuate a cycle where individuals with textured hair feel underserved and marginalized. Furthermore, since many cosmetology schools are part of a co-op high school curricula, and many receive state funding, they can be prone to the same issues of educational redlining and discrimination that public primary and secondary schools are (Samuels; Lukes 1-5). Residential segregation patterns often result in racially homogenous schools, which likely further perpetuates the education gap. State-funded cosmetology schools in economically disadvantaged areas are likely to have the same limited access to high-quality educators that primary and secondary schools have, which affects the overall quality of education. Schools in economically disadvantaged areas often receive fewer resources, resulting in outdated facilities, inadequate teaching materials, etc. Since textured hair education is currently not included in all but the newest editions of textbooks, textured hair mannequins are harder to find and cost more money,

and instructors aren’t educated on how to teach the new chapters, this funding gap can perpetuate educational inequities, limiting the quality of education for students in these communities.

Most cosmetology school experiences are aimed at teaching the fundamentals, and regardless of hair texture, students have more learning to do once they begin their careers in earnest. The problem is that students are learning only the basics of straight, fine textures of hair, and these techniques are not relevant to Black clients' needs. This lack of representation and education on textured hair in cosmetology textbooks directly contributes to the racial segregation within the industry by excluding a significant portion of the population from the narrative of beauty and hair care and communicates a message that textured hair is an anomaly or a niche concern rather than a fundamental aspect of the diverse clientele that cosmetologists serve. As a result, individuals with textured hair, who are predominantly Black, feel marginalized and underserved within the cosmetology industry. The absence of comprehensive textured hair education also perpetuates racial disparities in professional opportunities. Stylists who are not well-versed in caring for textured hair are ill-equipped to cater to a diverse clientele. This not only limits the career prospects of stylists but also reinforces stereotypes and biases that have historically hindered the full and equal participation of people of color in the cosmetology field.

The segregation within the industry has become such a noticeable issue that studies have been conducted to explore the experiences and perceptions of textured hair. In October 2020, haircare company TRESemmé conducted two such surveys aimed, in part, to explore the experiences and perceptions of professional hair stylists in caring for Black women's hair. They found that about 65% of stylists, including 70% of white stylists and 45% of Black stylists, expressed a desire for more training in styling and caring for textured hair. A majority (75%) of stylists indicated that advancing their career is best achieved through education, specifically in styling textured, coily, and kinky hair.

The beauty industry exhibits clear signs of segregation through its operational practices, as evidenced by the experiences within salons, retail environments, and educational institutions. Salons frequently segregate their clientele by race, often inadvertently, due to stylists' lack of training in diverse hair types. This is paralleled in retail settings, where products suitable for Black hair are not only segregated but also frequently understocked or locked away, highlighting a disparity in consumer treatment based on race. Furthermore, the educational practices in cosmetology schools reinforce this divide by failing to adequately cover textured hair, which perpetuates the lack of competence among stylists in handling diverse hair needs. These facets collectively illustrate the ongoing racial segregation within the industry, grounded in both practice and structure.

1.4 The Special Significance of Black Hair

There are a myriad of reasons to think Black hair can hold immense significance, representing far more than just a physical attribute. In the context of Black culture, Black hair is a symbol of identity, resistance, and expression, deeply rooted in, and reflective of the history of America. As Ayanna Byrd and Lori Tharps write in the introduction to *Hair Story*, “The word culture often gets misused and overused, but with Black hair, there is a real culture, in the way that anthropologists would define it: the learned patterns of behavior and thought that assist a group in adapting to its environment and include ritual, language, memory, and evolution” (Byrd and Tharps xiii).

Black hair holds such cultural significance that even within the Black community, discussions about hair texture and the choice between straightening or going natural can sometimes be points of contention due to differing perspectives, experiences, and societal pressures. These disagreements within the Black community regarding hair straightening or going natural are multifaceted and encompass various dimensions. They involve historical context, societal pressures, self-expression, cultural identity, family dynamics, and individual

choices. One of the controversies that has arisen at various points in U.S. history involves debate over the political and social function of natural hairstyles. For instance, while many black individuals at various points in U.S. history embraced the Afro as a political statement, others believed it represented extremism and separatism (Byrd and Tharps and Tharps 60). Some argue that natural hair is still just as much of a political statement as it has ever been and that wearing one's natural hair is a way of reclaiming culture and identity that has been suppressed for hundreds of years (Evangeline). In *Straightening Our Hair* bell hooks examines the complex dynamics surrounding the straightening of Black hair, highlighting its deep roots in white supremacist capitalist patriarchy. She points out that the practice often reflects an imitation of dominant white beauty standards, signaling internalized racism, self-hatred, and low self-esteem among black individuals. In her view, the obsession with straight hair among black people is indicative of a colonized mentality. However, hooks also acknowledges the positive aspects of this practice within the Black community, such as the salon being a space for bonding, sharing stories, and finding comfort. Hooks notes that the decline in political focus on the relationship between appearance and complicity with white racism led many who once wore afros to revert to straightening their hair, suggesting a complex and evolving relationship with these beauty practices (hooks, 2). In his article "Black Hair/Style Politics," meanwhile, Kobena Mercer challenges the idea that black hair straightening represents giving in to European beauty standards and colonization. Mercer argues that interpreting hair straightening solely as an imitation of white beauty ideals oversimplifies the complex cultural and psychological dynamics at play. He emphasizes the need to view hair styling as a multifaceted cultural activity, shaped by various influences including economics, politics, and personal expression. While hair is an organic product of biological processes and might appear to be a 'natural' part of the body, Mercer argues that it transcends being a mere biological fact due to the myriad ways it is socialized by humans. Hair is groomed, styled, cut, and altered in numerous ways by human hands, transforming it into a medium for making significant statements about personal identity

and societal norms (Mercer 34-35). Mercer suggests that hair straightening and other similar styles should be seen not just as an acquiescence to Eurocentric aesthetics, but also as a form of cultural adaptation and personal agency. “The ways we shape and style hair may be seen as both individual expressions of the self and as embodiments of society's norms, conventions, and expectations” (Mercer 34). For Mercer, hairstyles can be expressions of individual choice and creativity within the black community, transcending the binary of either conforming to or resisting White beauty standards. These points of contention reflect the complexity of navigating cultural expectations and personal preferences when it comes to hair texture within the Black community, but one thing that isn’t up for debate is the fact that how Black Americans wear their hair often significantly impacts their daily lives.

Black hair and hairstyles affect how Black individuals are perceived and how they are treated in everyday life. A 2020 study found that Black women with natural hairstyles are less likely to get called for job interviews than Black women with straightened hair. Participants were tasked with evaluating job candidates based on criteria such as professionalism and competence, and Black women with natural hairstyles received lower ratings and were less frequently recommended for job interviews. Interestingly, when the same Black woman's photos were presented to two different groups of participants—one with a natural hairstyle and the other with her hair straightened—those with straightened hair were described by participants as appearing more polished, refined, and respectable (Koval 2). Black women face the highest occurrences of hair discrimination. They are more likely to be sent home from the workplace because of their hair. Many Black women feel they need to switch their hairstyle to align with more conservative corporate standards to fit in at work (NAACP). A 2017 study using an implicit association test found that "a majority of people, regardless of race and gender, hold some bias towards women of color based on their hair" (Bates) Hairstyles like dreadlocks, braids, and afros, often worn by Black individuals, can become targets for profiling, as they are stereotypically associated with negative traits or criminal behavior. This bias exacerbates racial

profiling, as individuals with these hairstyles are more likely to be stopped, searched, or even arrested based on unfounded assumptions rather than actual behavior or evidence. Police accused of racial profiling commonly object that they aren't just looking for black individuals but for a "certain kind" of black individual who is likely to be up to no good (McWhorter). For example, in 2011, Brooklyn City Councilman Jumaane Williams was stopped by the police, wrestled to the ground, and detained for being in a blocked-off area of the city while looking "street" with his dreadlocks and earring (McWhorter). In 2019, a Maine State Trooper's internal microphone in his cruiser recorded comments he made to his partner just before the stop; "To be honest with you, this guy kinda looks like a thug" due to the individual having dreadlocks and wearing a white tank top (Gray). The findings from these studies underscore a systemic issue where Black individuals with traditionally Black hairstyles like dreadlocks, braids, and afros, face discrimination that impacts their professional opportunities, personal dignity, and safety.

Black hair is deeply intertwined with cultural identity and expression, and as such, its importance is expressed in various ways through art, literature, and pop culture. These forms of expression often reflect the broader social and cultural attitudes towards Black identity. Music, TV/film, visual art, and literature have all played a significant role in expressing the special importance of Black hair.

Music, especially R&B and hip-hop, has been a platform for expressing the importance of Black identity, including hair. Lyrics often touch on themes of self-love, empowerment, and embracing natural beauty. In "Don't Touch My Hair" Solange Knowles equates her hair with her feelings, soul, rhythm, crown, and pride, drawing attention to her hair as an expression of her self, and the desire for agency and control over her own body and identity (Knowles). The lyrics of "Crown" by Kelly Rowland demonstrate that Black hair has significance beyond aesthetics by conveying messages of self-love and empowerment. The lyrics emphasize that Black hair is beautiful regardless of its length, texture, or style. The repeated refrain of "I wear my crown" suggests that Black hair is not just a physical feature but a symbol of pride, empowerment, and

self-worth. The lines "People gon' talk, always got opinions" and "Gon' let my hair down, I ain't gotta hear 'em" signify a rejection of external judgments and a declaration of personal autonomy and encourage women to embrace their natural hair and challenge societal expectations and opinions (Rowland). In Ciara's lyrics for "Rooted," Ciara reclaims and celebrates the term “nappy head,” which has historically been used as a derogatory term[3], turning it into a symbol of pride and rootedness in Black culture. The lyrics "Rooted, nappy head rooted," assert that natural, textured hair is an integral part of identity and cultural heritage. The verses, with references to historical figures like Harriet Tubman, Rosa Parks, and Martin Luther King Jr., reinforce the idea of being rooted in a legacy of strength, resilience, and excellence (Ciara).

Popular TV shows and movies also speak to the cultural, social, and psychological significance of Black hair, addressing themes such as identity, self-expression, and societal perceptions. An episode of the TV show "Black-ish" titled "Hair Day," speaks to the significance of Black hair's role in shaping identity, relationships, and societal perceptions. The episode follows Diane, the Johnson family's fourth child, as she navigates her coming-of-age journey in middle school, particularly focusing on her decision to stop relaxing her hair. The salon is shown as a bonding place for Diane and her mother Rainbow, and as a powerful and intimate environment for community with other Black women (Robinson). The opening of the 2018 film "Nappily Ever After" begins with Violet reminiscing about how her mother was obsessed with making sure her child was as well groomed “as any white child.” She laments, "They would play, hair uncombed, no shoes, traces of everything they'd eaten smeared on their faces, completely happy and oblivious to any possible defects to their appearance. I, on the other hand, had to be fixed. wash, conditioner, and hot comb, until my hair was straight enough to run her fingers

[3] This phrase's derogatory usage was notably highlighted during the 2007 incident involving radio host Don Imus, who called the the Rutgers University women's basketball team “Nappy-headed hoes”, sparking widespread controversy and discussions about racial slurs in media (History.com Editors).

through it without one snap, crackle, or pop” (Nappily Ever After 2018). Throughout the film, Violet grapples with societal pressures, particularly from her mother and societal norms, which emphasize the importance of straightened hair. In a moment of liberation and rebellion against perfection, she impulsively shaves her head, symbolizing a break from conforming to Eurocentric beauty standards and embracing her natural beauty. Through Violet's journey, she discovers the empowerment and confidence that can come from embracing her natural hair texture. Chris Rock’s documentary "Good Hair" illustrates that for Black people, hair is more than just a physical attribute—it is intertwined with history, culture, identity, and societal expectations, making it uniquely significant in the Black experience. Different hairstyles are shown as expressions of personal and cultural identity. The documentary illustrates how individuals use their hair to communicate aspects of their identity, whether it be a connection to their African roots, a celebration of cultural diversity, or a reflection of personal style. Segments on traditional hair braiding and styling showcase the intricate techniques that have been preserved and passed down within the Black community. These traditions are presented as more than just grooming practices—they are art forms that carry cultural meaning (Good Hair 2009).

In "Americanah," a novel by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, the main character Ifemelu's hair symbolizes her struggle for identity and confidence as both a black American and a Nigerian immigrant. Upon arriving in the United States, she resists the pressure to conform to Western beauty standards, particularly regarding her hair. Aunty Uju, her aunt, reinforces the idea that to succeed in America, Ifemelu must alter her appearance, including relaxing her hair for a more "professional" look. Ifemelu, however, sees this as a deliberate abandonment of one's authentic self, something she is unwilling to do. Ifemelu's journey with her hair reflects her connection to her Nigerian identity. Ifemelu decides to cut and eventually relax her hair in an effort to expand her job opportunities, but she experiences a profound sense of loss, and the burning sensation during the hair-relaxing process symbolizes the sacrifice of confidence and

independence, leading her to feel that there was “something organic dying which should not have died” (Adichie 251). Ifemelu notes that despite the limited availability of Black salons in her college town, there is no shortage of relaxers on the drug store shelves (Adichie 251).

Black hair holds such immense cultural and historical significance that visual artists create works to celebrate Black hair as a means of affirming and reclaiming cultural narratives, challenging stereotypes, and highlighting the beauty and diversity of Black hair, as well as contributing to broader conversations about representation and social justice. “Hair in African Art and Culture” was a traveling exhibition organized by the Museum for African Art in New York showcasing more than 170 objects from collections around the world to illustrate the significance of Black hair in African and American society. After its initial presentation in New York from February to May 2000, the exhibition began a national tour (Byrd and Tharps 160). The exhibition featured a companion catalog offering essays on the significance of the art and the hair it depicts.

Barber Shop sign West Africa. Enamel on wood panel. H: 61 cm
Roy and Sogisia Sicher

[4]

In a review of the exhibit for *American Anthropologist* praising the exhibit and its companion book for exploring the beauty and significance of African hairstyles, Thomas R. Miller writes, “Because it is both naturalized as an inherited biological signifier of binary racial difference and culturalized as an unfixed and potentially destabilizing sign of group identity, hair is widely seen as a bodily indicator of cultural self-identification, political ideology, and social status” (Miller 182).

[4] Herreman, Frank, et al. Hair: In African Art and Culture. New York, NY: The Museum for African art, 2000.

Sonya Clark is a visual artist whose work explores themes of identity, race, and cultural heritage. She often employs fiber-art techniques using hair as a medium, which she sees as a substance rich with cultural and metaphorical meanings. “My stories, your stories, our stories are held in the object. In this way, the everyday ‘thing’ becomes a lens through which we may better see one another” (Clark). For Clark, strands of hair symbolize ancestral connections, hairstyles communicate intimacy and express Black visibility and identity, and combs with bared teeth illustrate how hair has functioned as a tool of political resistance throughout the African diaspora.

Sonya Clark, *Cotton to Hair*, 2012; Cotton and human hair, 14 1/2 x 12 1/2 x 5 in.; Tony Podesta Collection, Washington, D.C.; © Sonya Clark; Photo by Lee Stalsworth [5]

[5] Sonya Clark, “Text,” Sonya Clark, accessed December 4, 2023, https://sonyaclark.com/sc_text/sonya-clark-2/.

Given the significance of hair to Black identity and expression, it is no surprise that its cultural and historical significance and the personal experiences and stories associated with it are recurring themes in various forms of art and media.

Furthermore, as we will see later in the next chapter, throughout history, hair can be more than just an *expression* of culture or ideas, but can also serve as a form of active resistance. During the era of slavery and after, braiding and other styling techniques were not only functional but also served as a form of communication, resistance, and identity. The historical oppression faced by Black people is actively resisted by the wearing of natural hairstyles, such as Afros, twist-outs, dreadlocks, etc, which symbolize a divergence from, and refusal of those Eurocentric standards. Historically, Black hair has also had economic and cultural significance within the Black community, with the hair industry serving as a major business opportunity for Black individuals and families. In these ways, Black hair is an integral aspect of Black liberation in ways that transcend mere aesthetics and define a crucial part of Black identity.

2. Salon Segregation in Historical Context

A Case Against the Naturalism Argument

Now that I have established that segregation in salon spaces is something *that exists*, one might reasonably ask if it is the kind of thing that *should be corrected*. It might be argued that the existence of Black salons and White salons doesn't need correcting because it is generally the result of personal choice on the part of both Black clients and White clients. I think this idea stems from a broader claim about segregation in general: post-Civil Rights era segregation in areas such as housing, schooling, and social circles is largely the result of individual preferences.

While I do think it is likely that *part* of the reason Black clients choose Black salons is because of a desire for shared experiences and presumed specialized skills, personal preference is not the primary reason for the segregation of salon spaces. In section 2.1, I will first present what I call the naturalism argument, which is the claim that in the absence of significant harm, segregation that is a product of individual choices is not something that warrants intervention or correction. In section 2.2, I'll then discuss reasons to think the naturalism argument fails to sufficiently explain modern segregation in general. In section 2.3 I will show that, in the particular case of salon spaces, the naturalism argument also fails because salon space segregation largely isn't the result of individual choice. In section three, I demonstrate that salon space segregation causes the kind of harm that warrants intervention.

2.1 The Naturalism Argument

The "naturalism argument" postulates that the persistent segregation observed in the United States is a naturally occurring phenomenon that is largely attributable to individual preferences and choices. And since freedom of choice is fundamental to society in the United States, it should be respected in all scenarios, provided it does not significantly infringe upon the well-being of others. Within this framework, it's asserted that the current state of segregation is a benign reflection of individual freedom that doesn't result in harm and, therefore, doesn't require intervention.

The ideals of personal liberty and individual choice have long shaped the cultural and political landscape of the United States. Influenced by Enlightenment-era era philosophical thinkers like John Locke, these ideals underscore the importance of individual freedom in a just society. The idea is that individuals possess certain inalienable rights by nature, such as life, liberty, and property, and the government's primary role is to protect these natural rights without unduly interfering with personal freedom (Locke XI, 137-142). This principle became a cornerstone of American political thought and is reflected in the U.S. Declaration of

Independence and Constitution. Mill's harm principle further reinforces the idea that individuals should be free to pursue their own desires unless their actions cause harm to others. Emphasizing individuality and freedom of expression, this principle asserts that diversity of thought and lifestyle benefits society (Mill 13). Thus, it is thought that personal choices should generally be respected, and government intervention should only occur when an individual's actions cause significant harm to others.

Drawing on these philosophical traditions, proponents of the "naturalism argument" assert that as long as personal choices do not cause significant harm to others, individuals should be free to act according to their preferences. They argue that whatever outcomes arise from individual choices should not warrant intervention unless significant harm is evident.

While there might be disagreements about what exactly constitutes significant harm, proponents of this conception of liberty typically agree that physical harm is a clear example of behavior that justifies intervention. Actions such as assault, murder, and reckless driving directly endanger others' safety and well-being. Similarly, property damage—including vandalism, burglary, and arson—is a tangible violation of negative liberty, as it disrupts individuals' ability to enjoy their possessions unimpeded, and as such, likely warrants intervention. Of course, non-physical damages can constitute significant harm as well. Non-physical harms might come in the form of emotional and psychological harms and include things like the frustration of basic needs, desires and interests that are intrinsic and central to an individual's life goals. These situations can result in significant harm to welfare even if they do not cause immediate physical injury (Holtug 364-365).

Interventions to address harmful behaviors or conditions can occur at individual, institutional, and governmental levels. Individual-level interventions like social pressure, advocacy, and education encourage individuals to take a stand against harmful practices. Institutional-level interventions involve things like organizations implementing policies and support systems to prevent harm. Government-level interventions such as anti-discrimination

laws, consumer protection regulations, and environmental standards establish laws that protect individual rights and promote public safety.

Historically, it has been thought that post-Civil Rights era segregation in general is natural, that is to say, largely the result of individual preferences. For example, in the 1970s, economists like Thomas Shelling claimed that even mild individual preferences for neighbors of similar backgrounds could lead to segregation in areas such as housing, schooling, and social circles. His models showed that small preferences for familiar neighbors can aggregate into large-scale segregation patterns. Schelling's work suggested that segregation can emerge and persist not necessarily only from overt racism or institutional racism but also from the cumulative effect of natural tendencies and individual choices within a society (Shelling,1969). Schellings work seemed to have influenced the perspectives of students and academics in various fields, with his most popular paper having been cited over 6800 times since 1971 (Schelling,1971). Individual personal preferences are still cited as a main cause of continued segregation.[6] People sometimes think that segregation in aspects of society like housing and social circles is the result of cultural or social preferences because individuals tend to seek out familiar environments and social groups where they feel comfortable and understood. This tendency to gravitate towards similar others seems rooted in a natural human inclination for familiarity and cultural affinity. These preferences are assumed to be the primary cause of communities and social networks that are segregated along racial lines. This perspective views segregation not primarily as a consequence of systemic factors but as a product of individual choices based on cultural compatibility and comfort.

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[6]Reynolds Farley et al., “Stereotypes and Segregation: Neighborhoods in the Detroit Area,” American Journal of Sociology 100, no. 3 (1994): 750–780, https://doi.org/10.1086/230580. Camille Zubrinsky Charles, Won’t You Be My Neighbor? Race, Class, and Residence in Los Angeles (New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation, 2006). Lawrence Bobo and Camille L. Zubrinsky, “Attitudes on Residential Integration: Perceived Status Differences, Mere in-Group Preference, or Racial Prejudice?,” *Social Forces* 74, no. 3 (1996): 883, https://doi.org/10.2307/2580385.W.A.V. Clark, “Residential Preferences and Neighborhood Racial Segregation: A Test of the Schelling Segregation Model,” Demography 28, no. 1 (1991): 1–19, https://doi.org/10.2307/2061333.

2.2 Naturalism Fails In The General Case

In the context of the United States, we have strong reasons for being suspicious of the idea that segregation in general is natural. The concept of segregation as a "natural" phenomenon oversimplifies the complex historical, institutional, and socio-economic factors that have systematically enforced and maintained racial segregation. This argument fails to account for the deliberate social, political, and economic mechanisms that have led to entrenched systems of racial subordination and segregation. This section will provide evidence that the notion of segregation as a natural occurrence does not hold up in the general case, and the following historical account will provide evidence that it doesn't hold up in the *particular* case of salon spaces either.

To illustrate the problematic framing of segregation as natural or inevitable, sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva observes: "The word ''natural'' or the phrase ''that's the way it is'' is often interjected to normalize events or actions that could otherwise be interpreted as racially motivated (residential segregation) or racist (preference for whites as friends and partners)" (Bonilla-Silva 37). Bonilla-Silva says that most social scientists view naturalism as a poor primary explanation for racial segregation because it fails to consider the complex historical, institutional, and socio-economic factors that have systematically enforced and maintained segregation, and it underplays the role of discrimination and power dynamics in this process. "Few things that happen in the social world are ''natural,'' particularly things pertaining to racial matters. Segregation, as well as racial preferences, are produced through social processes and that is the delusion/illusion component of this frame" (Bonilla-Silva 37). The data presented in a variety of studies highlight that a majority of African Americans, especially those in urban areas, continue to experience high levels of residential segregation in U.S. cities. Such high levels of segregation are not naturally occurring phenomena but are the result of historical and systemic factors, including policies and practices that have perpetuated racial inequalities over time. The

historical context of racial segregation in the U.S. shows that it has been maintained through various social, political, and economic mechanisms since colonial times, including practices like Jim Crow laws. Furthermore, this segregation is not just a thing of the past but continues to be reinforced by current societal structures and policies. These mechanisms have led to a deeply entrenched system of racial subordination and segregation that extends far beyond individual preferences or socioeconomic differences.[7]

Bonilla-Silva argues that many individuals, even those who claim not to be racist, are unaware of the ways in which they participate in and benefit from racial inequality (Bonilla-Silva 105). Bonilla-Silva argues that segregation is not solely a result of individual biases, but rather a product of systemic and structural factors that perpetuate racial inequalities. These include historical policies, economic systems, and social practices that have historically established and maintained racial divisions in society. (Bonilla-Silva 7-8).

Based on the data presented in the book, many White respondents expressed openness to or a preference for an interracial lifestyle. However, despite their professed support for interracialism, those respondents' actual behavior suggests that few live an integrated life (Bonilla-Silva 105). When asked about the people they interact with daily, a significant majority of them had no black individuals among their closest associates, admitted to having predominantly White social circles, and had never been in a romantic relationship with a black person. Only a small number of those interviewed reported living in or growing up in an integrated neighborhood. Bonilla-Silva found that many did not perceive such racial segregation as a problem in their lives, as they viewed it as not being about race, just as a non-issue, or as

[7] Zinzi D. Bailey, Justin M. Feldman, and Mary T. Bassett, "How Structural Racism Works — Racist Policies as a Root Cause of U.S. Racial Health Inequities," New England Journal of Medicine 384, no. 8 (2021): 768–773, https://doi.org/10.1056/nejmms2025396; Mahzarin R. Banaji, Susan T. Fiske, and Douglas S. Massey, "Systemic Racism: Individuals and Interactions, Institutions and Society," Cognitive Research: Principles and Implications 6, no. 1 (2021), https://doi.org/10.1186/s41235-021-00349-3; Emily C. Clark et al., "Structural Interventions That Affect Racial Inequities and Their Impact on Population Health Outcomes: A Systematic Review," BMC Public Health 22, no. 1 (2022), https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-022-14603-w: Douglas S. Massey, "Segregation and Stratification: A Biosocial Perspective," Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race 1, no. 1 (2004): 7–25, https://doi.org/10.1017/s1742058x04040032.

just “the way it is” (Bonilla-Silva 112). Only a small number recognized the potential issues with racial homogeneity, often struggling to explain it without implicating themselves as prejudiced.

There is an obvious difference between what White respondents *say* they want, and what their behavior suggests they want. This phenomenon is a part of what he terms "color-blind racism." Color-blind racism operates under the guise of equality, where people claim they do not see race or treat everyone the same, yet systemic inequalities persist. This form of racism is particularly problematic because it allows individuals to deny the existence of racial privilege and discrimination, and doing so perpetuates racial inequality (Bonilla-Silva, 3-4). Bonilla-Silva highlights four frames for color-blind racism: abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and minimization of racism. Abstract Liberalism involves using ideas associated with political liberalism and the concepts of individual liberty discussed in 2.1 to explain racial matters. For example, arguing that economic disparities between races are the result of individual choices rather than systemic inequalities (Bonilla-Silva 28). Naturalization is the belief that racial disparities or segregation are natural occurrences. For instance, suggesting that people from different races naturally prefer to group with their own kind, which justifies the existence of segregated neighborhoods or schools (Bonilla-Silva 28, 37). Cultural racism involves primarily blaming cultural differences for disparities between races, rather than acknowledging systemic issues. This can manifest in statements that attribute poverty or educational gaps to cultural or behavioral issues within a racial group (Bonilla-Silva 29, 40). Minimization of racism is the downplaying of the role of racism in modern society, with claims that racism is no longer a significant issue or is restricted to a few extremists (Bonilla-Silva 29, 43). These mechanisms allow people to maintain a self-image of being non-racist while still supporting practices and policies that perpetuate racial inequality. By doing so, they contribute to the maintenance of racial hierarchies and the exclusion of minorities from equal participation in society (47). These mechanisms also allow White people to explain their choices on where to live as having nothing to do with racial preference when the data seems to suggest otherwise.

Even though Whites claim to be choosing to live in homogenous neighborhoods for race-neutral reasons, the racist structures and institutions in society operate in the background, and colorblind ideology allows Whites to remain ignorant of those facts while perpetuating the segregation.

Neighborhood segregation is a result of systemic and institutional policies and practices, which can influence cultural and personal preferences in more profound ways than it might seem at first. Though it is the case that often, the choice of salon can be more flexible than the choice of neighborhood, the choice of salon is not only influenced by the location of the salon, (which is influenced by the same historical discriminatory practices as housing segregation), but is also influenced by the same historical, institutional racism that underlies choices of social circles and neighborhoods. In "White America is Quietly Self-Segregating," Alvin Chang argues that white Americans are increasingly choosing to live in racially homogeneous neighborhoods. This self-segregation, he says, is fueled by socioeconomic factors, racial attitudes, and educational opportunities. Citing a study by Maria Krysan which shows that self-segregation by minorities is an incomplete explanation[8] Chang argues that it's not black and Latino people who are self-segregating into neighborhoods, it's white residents who say they want more diversity but end up house-hunting in more homogenized areas. So the data suggests that residential and social segregation is not due exclusively to choices made by minorities wishing to congregate with those most like them, but rather that White individuals are choosing to self-segregate residentially and socially.

The argument that segregation is a "natural" phenomenon fails to hold up in the general case. As evidenced by Bonilla-Silva's analysis and Chang's observations, the framing of segregation as a natural or inevitable outcome oversimplifies and obscures the complex

[8]Maria Krysan, “Racial Residential Segregation and the Housing Search Process,” Figshare, August 2, 2021, accessed July 10, 2023, https://indigo.uic.edu/articles/report/Racial_residential_segregation_and_the_housing_search_process/15085224

interplay of historical, institutional, and socio-economic factors that have systematically enforced racial segregation in the United States. Color-blind racism allows many White Americans to claim non-racism while unknowingly perpetuating systemic inequalities through their choices and behaviors. This phenomenon is not limited to residential patterns but extends into social circles and seemingly neutral spaces, where the influence of historical discrimination continues to manifest. Thus, the deeply entrenched systems of racial subordination and segregation are far from natural occurrences and instead represent the cumulative impact of deliberate social, political, and economic mechanisms.

2.3 Naturalism Fails in the Specific Case of Salon Spaces:

A History of Hair in The United States

Now that I've demonstrated how this argument falls short in general, I'll argue that it fails in the case of salon spaces in particular by exploring the historical context of Black hair in the United States. Just as with residential and other forms of social segregation, salon segregation cannot simply be attributed to Black individuals naturally choosing to self-segregate for their hair care needs. Instead, some of the same systemic and structural factors, implicit biases, and discriminatory practices that influence housing and social segregation also impact salon segregation. Furthermore, the history of Black hair and haircare in the United States has its own unique ties to racism and segregation.

At first glance, it might seem plausible that salon space segregation is a naturally occurring phenomenon due to the unique hair care needs of different hair textures. The specialized skills, products, and techniques required for various hair types could initially suggest that individuals self-segregate based on preference and convenience, aligning with the idea that people simply gravitate toward environments where their specific needs are best met. Furthermore, for some individuals, going to a salon is not just about hair care but also about

community and shared experiences, and as such, people might gravitate towards salons where they feel more culturally or socially connected. All of these factors can be perceived as practical choices rather than indications of segregation, suggesting that individuals might choose salons based on cultural or social comfort that often aligns with racial lines. However, this perspective overlooks the systemic and structural factors that contribute to salon space segregation. Implicit biases, historical discrimination, and systemic inequities often dictate where salons are located, who owns them, and who feels welcome in them. Additionally, social pressures and stereotypes can influence individuals' choices, leading to a form of segregation that isn't purely based on preference or convenience. These structural issues, rather than just individual choices, play a significant role in shaping the segregation observed in salon spaces.

2.3.1 Black Hair Care Has Roots in Slavery and Other Historical Biases

Black hairstyling can be traced back as early as 500 B.C. with artwork from the Nok civilization of Nigeria showing African women in twists and other elaborate hairstyles (Adewumi 10). Hair in West African societies functioned as a way of conveying complex language and meaning, indicating marital status, age, religion, ethnicity, wealth, rank, clan membership, etc. (White 49). For many West African tribes, hair was seen as having spiritual qualities, aiding in spiritual connection, and as the place that housed a person's spirit. Some communities believed that if one’s hair fell into the wrong hands, harm could come to the hair’s owner (Matshego). Long, thick, neat hair was a symbol of fertility for African women, and Hair care and styling was therefore the role of an important and trusted tribe member and the intricate work sometimes took hours or days (Byrd and Tharps 2).

When the European slave trade picked up in the early 1500s, African hairstyles, along with their significant cultural and spiritual meanings, were forcibly erased as millions of Africans were enslaved and transported to the New World. Many slaves had their heads shaved upon arrival under the guise of being a necessary sanitary measure, but what it really did was strip

away their identity and cultural heritage (Byrd and Tharps 10, White 49). By the 1600s, West Africans were regularly being shipped to North America where some slaveholders would shave the heads of their slaves as punishment for perceived misbehavior.[9] Though many other early slave owners seemed to have allowed Black slaves to style their hair as they saw fit, without the time and the tools to care for their hair properly, many found their hair becoming tangled and matted (White 49-50). Slaves sometimes used tools meant for carding sheep's wool, or grease and oil to keep their hair flat to their heads and untangled[10] (Adewumi). Other slaves who worked closely with the White family might wear their hair in whatever the White style of the day was. For instance, in the eighteenth century, it was fashionable for White upper-class men to wear wigs and so some Black slaves wore wigs as well, while others shaped and styled their own hair to look like a wig (Byrd and Tharps 13). Other times, however, Black hair was braided or twisted close to the scalp *similar* to traditional African styling, but, *unlike* with traditional African styling, the goal was to appear neat and tidy and non-threatening to Whites (Byrd and Tharps 12-13). Over time, European standards of beauty continued to be imposed on Black individuals, including expectations for hair texture and style. Straight or loosely curled hair was deemed more desirable, while natural Black hair was stigmatized and considered "unmanageable" or "uncivilized." Black slaves were often forced to try and maintain European grooming standards as a means of control and subjugation. Some slaves *chose* to wear their hair in an imitation of their White owners in order to gain a better position on the plantation. This often manifested as lighter-skinned slaves working in the house and darker-skinned slaves assigned to field labor (Johnson 139). As the trend of lighter-skinned, straighter-haired slaves finding favor with the white power structure persisted, a hierarchy based on skin tone and hair texture emerged within the slave community (Kerr 273). However having looser curls or silkier

[9] "Federal Writers' Project: Slave Narrative Project, Vol. 2, Arkansas, Part 6, Quinn-Tuttle," The Library of Congress, accessed May 9, 2024, https://www.loc.gov/item/mesn026 pp 257-8 Fannie Tatum.

[10] "Federal Writers' Project: Slave Narrative Project, Vol. 4, Georgia, Part 4, Telfair-Young (with Combined Interviews of Others)," The Library of Congress, accessed May 14, 2024, http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mesn.044 p36 Jane Mickens Toombs.

hair could also be a risk, particularly for women, as jealous plantation wives who knew the allure of longer straighter hair would sometimes shave their heads as punishment for being attractive (Byrd and Tharps 18). In Louisiana, Black women often wore elaborate hairstyles that attracted the attention of white men. To reduce this excessive attention to dress (on the part of the Black women, of course, not the attention of the white men) and enforce social hierarchy, Spanish colonial Governor Don Esteban Miró implemented the Tignon Laws. These laws mandated that Creole women of color, including even those who were free, cover their hair with a tignon (a scarf or handkerchief) to signify their social status as part of the slave class (Hnasheed).

By the 1800s, with Atlantic slave trading outlawed, slave owners allowed slaves some time for personal care and grooming so they could be sold for more money when it came time to sell or trade. Sunday became a day for slaves to attend to their own personal needs and having a skilled community hairstylist became invaluable once again (Byrd and Tharps 16). This resurgence of the importance of hair care coupled with the benefits of assimilation into the White slaveholder's culture and/or family further reinforces skin color/hair texture hierarchy, and Black hair is now thought of in terms of “good” and “bad.”[11][12] Good hair was thought of as long and smooth, and the straighter the better. Bad hair was the antithesis; kinky, tightly coiled, and growing up and out instead of down (Byrd and Tharps 18). Though slaves now had more time for hair care rituals, in the absence of traditional African hairdressing tools and products, slaves in America had to improvise with available Western household items. They used oil-based products like bacon grease and butter to condition and soften their hair, preparing it for straightening and adding shine. Cornmeal and kerosene served as scalp cleaners, and coffee

[11] Kamryn Z. Bess, “It’s More than ‘Just’ Hair: Revitalization of Black Identity,” Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, https://folklife.si.edu/magazine/black-hair-identity.

[12] “Federal Writers’ Project: Slave Narrative Project, Vol. 1, Alabama, Aarons-Young,” The Library of Congress, accessed May 15, 2024, https://www.loc.gov/item/mesn010/.

was used as a natural dye. Black women sometimes made homemade haircare products to use and sell to other Black women out of their homes, often with an eye toward smoothing, straightening, or otherwise “taming” Black hair (Byrd and Tharps 71). Ingenious methods for hair straightening were developed, including using axle grease as a dye and straightener, applying heated butter knives as curling irons, or wrapping hair in various materials to stretch curls. The use of lye mixed with potatoes for straightening, despite its effectiveness, was harmful and often times severely damaged the skin (Byrd and Tharps 17).

These hair straightening and smoothing practices were not solely about conforming, however, they were also deeply rooted in the pursuit of economic opportunity and social advantage. Lighter skin and loosely curled hair often signified social status or even freedom, which led many slaves to attempt to pass as free individuals by adopting these physical traits. The hair was a crucial feature in this endeavor, as it was often considered the most telling feature of Blackness (Byrd and Tharps 17).[13] [14] [15] Despite some slaves having skin as light as that of white people, (due to interracial “relationships” between slaves and their masters), it was the texture of their hair that primarily indicated their racial status. The presence of even slight kinkiness in hair was taken as a sign of Black ancestry, making it challenging for these individuals to pass as White. Consequently, some male slaves chose to shave their heads to eliminate this visible marker of their Blackness, especially when attempting to escape to freedom (Byrd and Tharps 17-18). This practice underscores the role of hair texture as a crucial, distinguishing characteristic in the racial dynamics of that era. Especially during the era of

[13] W.E.B. Du Bois, Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1920), 116

[14] Langston Hughes, *The Ways of White Folks* (New York: Knopf, 1934), 45

[15] See also Nella Larsen's novella Passing which examines racial identity and the practice of passing as white. Hair is a central feature that distinguishes the characters in the novel; Nella Larsen, *Passing* (New York: Knopf, 1929), 31.

slavery, many White people derogatorily referred to Black people's hair as "woolly," denying it the status of real hair. This classification of hair texture, commonly used in runaway slave advertisements, auction posters, and newspapers, served to dehumanize Blacks and justify their inhumane treatment (Nabugodi 80). One announcement describing a runaway slave in the New York Gazette read "A mulatto wench is very well featured all but her nose and lips which are thick and flat, has long black curld (sic) hair, may pass for a free person" (Byrd and Tharps 17). Another from the Boston Gazette, mirroring the language of many advertisements[16] from the time, reads “His Wool extends far on his Face, and of a sallow Complexion.” The marginalization of Black people on the basis of their hair and skin, which was supported by the scientific community of the time, contributed to the systemic oppression of Black people living in The United States. As these racist beliefs were deliberately employed by slave owners in order to subjugate and control their slaves[17], Black women especially began to view themselves as inferior, a perception that made them more susceptible to control and one that was then passed down through generations, perpetuating the cycle of trauma and oppression (Byrd and Tharps 14). The distinction between good and bad hair, and the resulting haircare practices, which are deeply rooted in racial prejudices, valorized hair that resembled European textures and devalued the natural hair of Black Americans even within their own communities (Byrd and Tharps 17, Wingfield 37).

This hair and skin hierarchy persisted throughout the emancipation of slaves when lighter-skinned Blacks who had been free for generations, distinguished themselves as "bona fide" free Blacks and sought to establish their status as an elite group. In contrast, the newly

[16] The Freedom On The Move Database which is a database of fugitive slaves from North American history has many reviewed matches for “hair” in fugitive slave advertisements, as well as for the terms “bushy”, “wooly,” “shaved,” and “bald”; Freedom on the Move Project, “Freedom on the Move: Cornell University,” Freedom on the Move | Cornell University, accessed May 9, 2024, https://database.freedomonthemove.org/.

[17] In her autobiography, Harriet Jacobs describes the treatment of Black women and the stereotypes perpetuated about their appearance: "My mistress had taught me the precepts of God's Word: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.' But I was her slave, and I suppose she did not recognize me as her neighbor. I was merely a piece of property" ; Harriet Jacobs, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl (Boston: Published for the Author, 1861), 5.

emancipated, often with darker skin, were derogatorily termed "sot free." This distinction led to a clear segregation in social structures, including schools, social organizations, and business networks, where having light skin and "good" hair often became prerequisites for inclusion. Even religious institutions were not immune to this hierarchy. Anecdotal evidence from this period points to the existence of "bona fide" churches that employed discriminatory practices for membership. One such practice was the "comb test," where a fine-toothed comb was hung at the church entrance. Prospective members had to demonstrate that the comb could pass smoothly through their hair, a test designed to exclude those with kinkier hair textures. Similarly, the "brown-bag test" was used to assess skin color, comparing it to the color of a paper bag to determine whether it was light enough for acceptance (Jackson-Lowman). These tests underscored the deep-seated prejudices within the community, reinforcing the hierarchy that favored European beauty standards. The emancipation of slaves brought further difficulties to Black Americans who now needed to fit into society alongside White Americans who would scrutinize their every action. Black individuals who wore their hair straightened in an imitation of popular White hairstyles are seen as “well adjusted” to their new-found freedom and less threatening to the White majority (Byrd and Tharps 21, 26).

Advertisers--both White and Black--used these beliefs about hair texture and skin color to sell hair straighteners and skin lighteners that were meant to improve the user's ability to move up in the world, fit in, and be “well adjusted.” Many advertisements of the early 1900s read like insults: “In a short time all your kinky, snarly, ugly hair becomes soft, silky, smooth. … "Positively nothing detracts so much from your appearance as short, matted unattractive hair." (Byrd and Tharps 72). The promotion of these products as a way to conform to Eurocentric beauty standards perpetuated the idea that natural Black hair was undesirable or something needing to be "fixed." Users of these products in an attempt to appear less threatening or offensive to their White owners, or later to try and fit into the dominant White culture, were willing to endure dangerous chemicals and processes to get the looks they desired

(Blackwelder; Byrd and Tharps). These products with their harmful ingredients not only failed to perform miracles but could be harmful or even deadly (Byrd and Tharps 2).[18]

Prior to the Civil War, slaveholders sometimes trained their slaves to style White hair and would lend them out to other White families for styling or barbering services. Free Black women began to make and sell styling products out of their homes. Around this time slave-run and free-Black owned barbershops also began to crop up though they were allowed only to serve White clientele at this time (Byrd and Tharps 71-72). As the twentieth century began, Whites forced Black women almost completely out of their role as stylists to White families (Blackwelder 11). One reason for this is likely the success of the Harper Method Shops. In 1888 after becoming suspicious of the chemicals used in many of the hair products available to consumers, White former servant Martha Harper created her own hair tonic and hair care method and opened her own hair shop called the Harper Method Shop. By 1891 she had created a network of franchise salons all trained in her method, and at the peak of its success, the Harper Method had 500 salons and training centers across the United States (Chiarelli). As a result of losing their clientele, Black entrepreneurs began to create products, schools, and salons dedicated to Black haircare. Before the 20th century, the Black hair care product industry was dominated by white manufacturers, with companies like Plough and Ozonized Ox Marrow targeting Black consumers. Their marketing strategies exploited the insecurities of Black people, promising to transform their natural hair texture. These advertisements were often insulting and demeaning, leading to wariness and anger among Black consumers. The Black community expressed concern that these products, promoted in a disrespectful manner, might be harmful, even dangerous. This sentiment was reflected in editorial critiques, warning against the potentially hazardous products marketed by white companies. The Chicago-Whip warned

[18] See Chapter 1 of Doing Business With Beauty, titled “The Beauty Industry Is Ours”: Developing African American Consumer Citizenship in the 1920s and 1930s for a history of advertising and consumerism surrounding Black hair care companies during this time. Wingfield, Adia Harvey. Doing Business with Beauty: Black Women, Hair Salons, and the Racial Enclave Economy. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009.

readers not to trust ” advertisements for dangerous preparations made by White men,” “Be beautiful if you can, but don't burn your brains out in the attempt” (Byrd and Tharps 74). Note the adoption of the Eurocentric beauty standards here, beauty still equals straight silk hair, it’s just not worth bodily harm at the hands of White men.

In the early 1900’s wealthy Blacks created the image of the “New Negro” where success was defined by education, love of the arts, music, domesticity, etc. (Rooks 80). Hair was essential to the construction of this image, and how one Black individual presented was seen to affect the image of all Blacks (Byrd and Tharps 28-30).[19] [20] In 1902 Black female entrepreneur Annie Turnbo Malone opened up the Poro company and began to train other Black women to use and sell her hair care products made to straighten and smooth Black hair. By 1918 she had built a multi-million-dollar campus that had a factory for her products, offered employment and lodging for Black women, as well as a meeting place for Black organizations who were denied access to public spaces. Poro Company also offered a school for training students to use her hair care system (Byrd and Tharps 32). One such student would soon become Malone’s biggest rival. In 1905, Poro graduate Sara Breedlove, better known as Madam C.J. Walker, created her own product line of hair care products, and by 1910 had opened her own laboratory, factory, and beauty school (Adewumi 10). Madam C.J. Walker perfected and popularized the hot comb for pressing textured hair, and developed a comprehensive hair-straightening system that Black women could use to provide the Walker system services to clients (Byrd and Tharps 77). Malone and Walker revolutionized Black hair care by creating products specifically for Black hair issues like chronic hair loss and scalp diseases.[21] However, the industry faced challenges from

[19] There was, however, also *opposition* to Black adherence to a White standard of beauty. Booker T. Washington, Nannie Burroughs, and later W.E.B. DuBois, Marcus Garvey, and others publicly opposed the act of straightening Black hair (Byrd and Tharps 37-38). Garvey is quoted as saying “Don't remove the kinks from your hair. Remove them from your brain” (Griffin 2019).

[20] Rosa Pleasant, “Black Hair Power: A Discussion of the Role of Black Hairdressers in Nineteenth-Century California,” Equality Before the Law: California Black Convention Activism, 1855-65,

[21] Though Walker is often celebrated for revolutionizing Black hair care and establishing a successful business empire, she also became a symbol in discussions about race, identity, and capitalism. In the novel "Black No More," published in 1931, George Schuyler introduces a character named Madame Sisseretta Bland, who is clearly a caricature of Walker. This character, like Walker, builds

larger White manufacturers, especially post-Depression, as they began to dominate the market with products like permanent hair straighteners. Innovations like the California Curl by Black inventor and entrepreneur Willie Lee Morrow were driven out of the market by White entrepreneurs like Jheri Redding who developed a knockoff called the Jheri Curl. White companies increasingly infiltrated the Black hair care market, sometimes using culturally appropriated marketing strategies, leading to significant competition for Black-owned businesses (Byrd and Tharps 91-92).In the mid-1940s after the Great Depression weakened Black beauty product businesses, White manufacturers established themselves as key players in the hair game. White-owned companies held over 50% of the market while Poro and Walker companies were only able to hold onto around 3% combined (Byrd and Tharps 80). The primary goal for the industry was to create a product that could straighten kinky hair permanently, and non-White manufacturers began to seek reclamation of the market. In 1948, a Mexican chemist named Jose Calva introduced Lustrasilk Permanent, which claimed to achieve this, but the product could only be applied by a trained cosmetologist in a salon setting (Byrd and Tharps 84). Walker Manufacturing followed suit a year later with its own in-salon straightener, but the product had limitations (Byrd and Tharps 82). The real game-changer happened in 1954 when George E. Johnson, a 26-year-old Black entrepreneur, introduced a safe and "permanent" straightening system called Ultra Wave Hair Culture (Wilson). This marked a significant step forward in Black hair straightening as it could be applied at home by consumers themselves (Byrd and Tharps 85). With White haircare companies ignoring the needs of Black consumers, between the 1950s and 1970s, Black entrepreneurs were able to create several multi-million dollar companies, though Johnson's products held 80% of the Black hair care market throughout the 1960s (Byrd and Tharps 83-88). As Black-owned companies like Johnson Products gained

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a fortune through the sale of hair straightening products and beauty treatments designed for Black women. Schuyler uses Sisseretta Bland to critique what he perceives as an obsession with mimicking white beauty standards, suggesting that such aspirations reflect deeper issues of racial self-esteem and the commercial exploitation of these insecurities; George S. Schuyler, Black No More (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2018).

success in the market, larger White-owned beauty manufacturers began to recognize the potential of the Black hair-care market. Companies like Revlon and Clairol entered the market by acquiring smaller Black-owned companies that offered products that catered to Black consumers (Wilson).

The 1960s saw a shift in consumer preferences, with the rise of the Afro and natural hairstyles leading some consumers to renounce chemical products and straighteners Wingfield 35). Some companies attempted to market their products using Black vernacular and the "Black is beautiful" spirit. Johnson Products adapted by developing moisturizing products for natural hairstyles, and this strategy proved successful. In 1971, the company became the first Black-owned company to trade on the American Stock Exchange and sponsored the TV dance show Soul Train (Byrd and Tharps 87). However, Johnson Products faced challenges in the late 1970s when the FTC ordered them to add a warning label to their lye-based relaxer, but didn't require the same standard of White-owned Revlon until two years later. Revlon capitalized on this by promoting their lye-based relaxer as a better and safer product (Byrd and Tharps 88). By 1980 Johnson Products had dropped from holding a 60 percent market share to 40 percent (Byrd and Tharps 90). In 1993, Johnson Products sold to the White-owned Ivax Corporation, marking a significant change in Black ownership within the industry (Byrd and Tharps 93). In 1981, ten Black-owned companies founded the American Health and Beauty Aids Institute (AHBAI), which aimed to support Black-owned businesses and encourage consumers to "buy Black," But still, larger White manufacturers continued to gain market share. In 1987 Revlon executive Irving Bottner told Newsweek Magazine "In the next couple of years, the Black-owned businesses will disappear. They'll all be sold to White companies" (Byrd and Tharps 70).

By the late 20th century, the ethnic hair-care industry was characterized by a shift in trends, with natural styles gaining popularity. Large White-owned corporations dominated the industry by marketing their products using African culture and packaging with names like "African Pride," and ingredients that supposedly came from the "Motherland" (Byrd and Tharps

91).[22] One such company, selling their hair straightening solution called Rio on late-night infomercials, claimed to be an all-natural, chemical-free relaxer for Black women to be free of the bondage that was chemical relaxer use. Instead of freedom over two thousand users had chemical burns, green hair, and/or complete hair loss (Byrd and Tharps 92). By the dawn of the 21st century, as the Revlon executive predicted, the manufacture of haircare products became increasingly White-owned (Walker 13).

The hair typing system for Black hair, popularized by Black stylist Andre Walker in 1997, has played a significant role in the modern understanding and care of textured hair. Walker, known for his work with celebrities like Oprah Winfrey, introduced this system to help individuals identify their hair texture and find suitable hair care routines and products from his haircare line. The system categorizes hair into four main types (1 through 4) with subcategories (A, B, and C) based on curl pattern, thickness, and texture. For instance, Type 4 hair, characterized by tightly coiled curls, is divided into 4A (soft and defined curls), 4B (less defined, more Z-shaped curls), and 4C (very tight coils with no defined curl pattern). Despite its widespread adoption, the system has faced criticisms for oversimplifying the diversity of Black hair textures, implicitly ranking hair types, and neglecting other crucial factors like porosity and density. Walker's system reflects the Eurocentric nature of the industry and society during the history that preceded its inception. While intended to empower and educate, the system's hierarchical implications can inadvertently perpetuate harmful beauty standards that favor looser curls and straighter hair. This legacy has influenced the perception and treatment of Black hair, contributing to a market that often fails to address the unique needs of textured hair adequately. Hair typing classification systems were not a new invention, in the early 20th century, German physician, anthropologist, and eugenicist Eugen Fischer applied his hair typing system in

[22] The Golden Brown Chemical Company even invented a fictional founder and implied that she was a Black woman with a rags-to-riches story similar to Mme. Walker and Annie Malone; Susannah Walker, "Style and Status: Selling Beauty to African American Women, 1920-1975 ," p25, JSTOR, 2007, accessed May 16, 2024, https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt2jcm09.

various studies meant to support eugenic ideologies that justified racial segregation, discrimination, and, ultimately, the superiority of certain races over others. Fischer's work, including his hair typing system, contributed to the pseudo-scientific foundations of Nazi racial theory and policies (Asare).[23] [24]

The historical journey of Black hair care in the United States, from its deep-rooted origins in African civilization to its complex evolution through the era of slavery and into the modern industrial landscape, is marked by both resilience and struggle. Hair, once a symbol of status, spiritual connection, and community in African societies, became a target for control and subjugation in the United States. Post-emancipation, these issues did not disappear; instead, they transformed, influencing social interactions and access to economic opportunities. The Black hair care industry emerged as a testament to Black innovation, providing not only economic empowerment but also a means to reclaim identity.

2.3.2 The Birth of Hair Salons and Beauty Schools in the United States

The birth of hair salons and beauty schools in the United States marks a significant evolution from individual hair care practices to institutionalized beauty services. This new era was significantly influenced by the preceding socio-cultural conditions and the segregationist policies that characterized early American society. As Black Americans continued to innovate within the confines of racial segregation, they not only created spaces that catered to the unique needs of Black hair but also carved out a niche that became an integral part of the economic fabric of their communities.

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[23] “Tool Used to Classify Hair Color in Racial Studies Conducted in Nazi Germany,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2023, accessed May 21, 2024, https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn3690.

[24] Unknown, “Eugen Fischer’s Hair Colour Gauge,” UCL CULTURE, accessed May 21, 2024, https://www.ucl.ac.uk/culture/ucl-science-collections/eugen-fischers-hair-colour-gauge.

Beauty culture in the 20th-century United States evolved from a combination of 19th-century social practices and growing consumerism. Cosmetology training was segregated from its inception due in part to the practices of slavery, racism, and colonialism. In the late 1800s, women mostly cared for their hair at home or had a hairdresser come to the house[25], Black slaves used to be regularly tasked as hairstylists to wealthy white women, but by the early days of the twentieth century, with Black hair care specialists were catering mostly to Black clients (Blackwelder 11). While some white men continued to frequent Black barbershops in the 1930s, virtually no white women visited Black beauty salons (Blackwelder 10). This period marked the rapid growth of the beauty industry as a significant sector of the Black economy. Racial segregation and discrimination shaped this industry, and as such, limited opportunities for Black Americans, but it also helped insulate their businesses a bit, as white-owned companies lacked an understanding of Black beauty needs and white hairdressers often refused service to women of color (Blackwelder 14).

Before the turn of the century, salon instruction and beauty school-type setups were a rarity. Beauty salon owners typically trained their employees through brief in-salon apprenticeships. This training began as a way for salon owners and beauty entrepreneurs to franchise their methods and products to their beauty workers. By 1920 salons that did this regularly had begun calling themselves “schools” and charging students for the training they offered even though there was no official curriculum, and most shops were training exclusively in a particular brand’s methods in order to gain more of the market (Blackwelder 8). Throughout the early 1900s, cosmetology schools began to pop up across the United States due largely to the demand for more complex styles like the bob haircut[26] and the need for formal training to

[25] Jeff Chiarelli, “A History of Beauticians,” Cosmetology School & Beauty School in Texas - Ogle School, accessed March 24, 2023, https://www.ogleschool.edu/blog/a-history-of-beauticians/.

[26] Victoria Sherrow, Encyclopedia of Hair: A Cultural History (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood, an imprint of ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2023).

provide dangerous chemical services like permanent waves and hair bleaching popular with White Americans at the time (Ruff 30-31, Chiarelli). By the 1930s, Madam Walker's beauty course offered comprehensive training in hair and skin care, including the treatment of common diseases, manicure fundamentals, and various hairstyling techniques like shampooing, hot oil treatments, and hair pressing. Emphasizing the importance of sanitation, the course instructed on sterilizing equipment, a shift from earlier advice on cleanliness (Blackwelder 30). In 1934 Henry M. Morgan established the first national chain of barber colleges for Black Americans, and at one point close to 80% of Black barbers in America had received their training from Morgan’s schools (Goodrich). In 1916 Black beautician Nobia A. Franklin developed her own homemade hair products and began her career by opening a salon in Fort Worth. Shortly after, she founded the Franklin School of Beauty Culture in Houston. By the early 1920s, nearly 500 students had graduated from her beauty school ready to pursue careers in cosmetology (Blackwelder 85). By 1917 Madame C.J. Walker had gotten her system of hair treatment into the curriculum of many vocational colleges catering primarily to African American students (Rooks 91).

By the 1920s Black hair care businesses were ubiquitous and thriving, for instance, in Chicago alone, there were 211 barbers and 108 beauty salons registered with the city (Byrd and Tharps 80). In the 1920s and early 1930s, White Cosmetology schools began to crop up in many more states across the U.S. (Ruff 5). By 1925, the U.S. boasted around twenty-five thousand beauty parlors. The average American woman spent about $150 annually on beauty products and services, while wealthier women could exceed this amount each week. During the Great Depression in the 1930s, women still prioritized hair care, even if it meant sacrificing other necessities. In 1936 alone, American women spent $6 million on hair care services (Sherrow). To cater to this demand, more cosmetology schools opened across the country during the 1930s and 1940s. Beauty salons and training academies were so pervasive in both White and Black neighborhoods by 1930 that state legislators began to call for their regulation and an

inspection process that would safeguard clients' health (Blackwelder 147). By 1940, in response to both the dangers of the chemical services that White salons popularized and the proliferation of beauty salons in every neighborhood, all 48 states had passed laws regulating the training and licensing of beauticians and salon safety standards. These regulations resulted in freestanding schools of beauty whose instructors had to be regulated by the state and many of these certified schools were racially segregated from the beginning. As these cosmetology schools became more regulated, they also became more formally segregated as schools chose to teach either an exclusively Eurocentric curriculum or to give different exams to students based on the color of their skin.[27] [28] Graduates of many White cosmetology schools were trained by White stylists and learned exclusively to care for straight silky hair textures of hair. Though some of the schools allowed Black students, Black graduates quickly realized they needed different education to work on their Black friends and family, as the techniques they had learned did not translate to kinky, coiled hair textures (Driskell). Although cosmetology training programs such as the Franklin School advertised that its students would learn techniques that served White as well as Black clients, graduates could not reasonably expect to gain full employment in a White salon doing more than sweeping and shampoos (Blackwelder 85). Some states had schools that were not segregated, but their exams were separated by race with students being given either the Black hair care exam or the White hair care exam (Blackwelder 31). Southern states adopted segregated cosmetology exams from their inception, and while many northern states started with mostly unified curricula and examinations, they too gradually implemented differing standards by race (Blackwelder 8, 147).

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[27] Syd Hayman, “Like Velvet: History in Black Hairstyles in Arkansas,” Arkansas Times, https://arktimes.com/entertainment/ae-feature/2019/02/01/like-velvet-history-in-black-hairstyles-in-arkansas.

[28] “Alabama Board of Cosmetology and Barbering Ledgers,” For the Record, accessed May 16, 2024, https://fortherecordalabama.blog/2022/12/06/cosmetology-and-barbering-ledgers/.

By the 1950s, chemical relaxers had largely replaced the straightening comb used in earlier years. Heat remained a crucial element in hair styling, however, with tools like the Marcel iron evolving into the modern curling iron. Metal curlers and hair dryers became more prevalent, allowing for more efficient hair setting, and techniques like finger waving were common. Despite some crossover in beauty techniques, beauty salons and schools in the United States remained racially segregated throughout the 1950s, following established laws and customs (Blackwelder 31). Some states, particularly those in the South, maintained racially segregated licensing exams for beauty training, sometimes even codifying separate curricula in training schools. With a focus on things like scalp and hair conditioning and hot iron sets, Black schools like Franklin didn't teach techniques frequently requested by White patrons. Meanwhile, White schools focused on things like chemical curls, wet sets, and haircutting which didn't serve the needs of Black clientele. Eventually, the Franklin School adjusted its advertising, focusing on training for Black techniques, largely because the state didn't require Black students to demonstrate proficiency in things like chemical curling, so the focus shifted to preparing Black students for the Black state Cosmetology exams. Even after legalized segregation ended in the 1960s, stylists in the U.S. continued to cater largely to women of one race, and though in the '60s, Black women again began to practice in shops that attracted white women, racial crossover in salon employment and customer base remains very small today (Blackwelder 140).

The trajectory of beauty culture in the early 20th century, from practical in-salon apprenticeships to the formal establishment of cosmetology schools, not only reflects a significant transformation in the beauty industry but also highlights deeper societal shifts, including increased consumerism and stratification by race and class. As these schools proliferated, the professional landscape of cosmetology began to take a more structured form, reflecting both advancements in beauty techniques and the deep-seated racial divide prevalent in wider American society. This formalization brought about a wave of regulations that, while intended to safeguard public health, also echoed historical biases and perpetuated segregation.

For instance, the focus of regulatory bodies predominantly catered to the safety concerns arising from styles popular among White women, often neglecting similar issues in Black salons until they became pressing concerns in the mainstream beauty scene. This oversight extended into the formation of organizations intended to professionalize and protect the industry.

2.3.3 Cosmetology Regulation Has Roots in Segregation and Historical Biases

The history of cosmetology regulation in the United States is not just a narrative of evolving standards and practices; it is a vivid illustration of the systemic biases and segregation that have shaped the beauty industry. The regulatory landscape has been deeply influenced by the broader societal values that prioritize Eurocentric beauty standards and disproportionately affect Black-owned businesses and consumers. The late introduction of regulations in response to the needs of White consumers, juxtaposed with the longstanding neglect of similar needs in Black salons, underscores a broader pattern of racial inequity.

Historically, beauty salons and barber shops have been subject to practices and regulations like zoning laws that perpetuate segregation and limit opportunities for Black-owned businesses. Early salon regulation was also influenced by historical biases and discriminatory practices in similar ways. Due to the focus of society and regulatory bodies on the needs of White individuals over those of non-Whites, the regulation of salons and schools only began when styles popular with *White women* began to require more technical skills and dangerous chemicals, whereas Black salons had been using similarly dangerous chemicals for years with no regulation. Only when permanent wave machines and bleach begin to cause bodily harm to the White women trying to mimic Jean Harlow do we see oversight begin to be put in place. In 1921, Charles Meeker Kozlay, the publisher of American Hairdresser, initiated the formation of the National Hairdressers Association (NHA) by organizing a national association meeting. At this meeting, five hundred inaugural members signed the Charter of the NHA. The main objectives of this newly formed group were to develop a hairdresser's textbook, create an

insignia, establish a code of ethics, and provide access to liability and malpractice insurance for all its members. One of their most significant goals was to influence legislative issues related to the hairdressing industry. This initiative marked a significant step in professionalizing and standardizing practices within the hairdressing field (Ruff 36). In 1931, the Research Bureau of the Royal Institute in New York City, surveyed the accidents caused by chemical processes used to achieve modern hairstyles and recommended regulation and training for the industry (Ruff 30-31). The advent of licensure and formal training led to the need for cosmetology schools with a state seal of approval to train women in the field, though the cost was low and the training brief, it still posed a barrier to families with few resources left after the Great Depression, and therefore it was easier for White women to afford the formal training than it was for Black women (Blackwelder 147).

Historically, ingredients used in beauty products that are aimed specifically at Black consumers have been subject to less rigorous testing and regulation compared to those used in mainstream white hair care products.[29] [30] The beauty industry continues to consistently prioritize and focus on Eurocentric beauty standards. As a result, regulatory frameworks and standards are established based on the needs and concerns of the dominant market, which excludes or marginalizes the specific needs of Black individuals. Hair relaxers and chemical straighteners, which are more commonly used by Black individuals, have faced less regulatory oversight compared to other hair care products not specifically targeting Black consumers. Concerns have been raised about the potentially harmful chemicals and the lack of comprehensive safety

[29] EWG, “Big Market for Black Cosmetics, but Less-Hazardous Choices Limited,” Environmental Working Group, https://www.ewg.org/research/big-market-black-cosmetics-less-hazardous-choices-limited.

[30] Marissa Chan et al., “Evaluating Neighborhood-Level Differences in Hair Product Safety by Environmental Working Group Ratings among Retailers in Boston, Massachusetts,” Environmental Health Perspectives 131, no. 9 (September 2023), https://doi.org/10.1289/ehp10653.

testing associated with these products (Adewumi, Benscome, Wilcox, Vesper). Chemicals like sodium or calcium hydroxide that often appear in products targeted to Black women come with a higher risk of cancers, and Black women have a higher exposure rate to those chemicals than do White women, due in part to the fact that there is much more social pressure for Black women to alter their hair in order to achieve economic and social successes (Karimi).

The establishment of regulatory bodies and professional associations, while ostensibly aimed at enhancing safety and standards across the industry, mirrored the prevailing social biases, often excluding or marginalizing Black professionals and consumers. This exclusion has perpetuated a division that extends beyond mere professional certification into societal norms and values. These racist practices, embedded in the foundation of the industry, have not merely faded into the background but persist robustly in today's society.

2.3.4 These Racist Practices Have Remained Influential

While the development and regulation of Black hair care products, cosmetology schools, and hair salons in the United States are the direct result of the racist practices in place during the foundation of the industry, these patterns of segregation still hold true today. As we have seen, the development and regulation of Black hair care products, cosmetology schools, and hair salons in the United States have their roots deeply embedded in the racist practices at the industry's inception. These foundational elements established a framework of segregation that dictated not only who could access certain beauty services and products but also shaped the professional landscape available to Black Americans. This historical segregation influenced everything from where salons could be located to the types of products that were developed and marketed to Black consumers. While overt segregation may no longer be legally sanctioned, the beauty industry continues to operate in ways that reflect its segregated past. This ongoing division within the industry not only traces back to historical biases but also perpetuates them,

as Black stylists and consumers navigate a market that continues to marginalize their needs and contributions.

Despite the claims of some people that we are living in a “post-racial” time, America’s personal and institutional practices have maintained high levels of residential, school, and social segregation. Whites today, despite the virtual elimination of Jim Crow, live fundamentally "white lives" (Bonilla-Silva 75) meaning their social circles, neighborhoods, and educational institutions remain largely homogeneous. This segregation persists in part due to colorblind racism, which emerged after the civil rights movement as a subtle but powerful form of racism. It allows racial inequalities to persist by masking them behind a veneer of equality and individualism. Although colorblind rhetoric promotes the idea that society has moved beyond race, systemic racism continues through institutional practices that disproportionately disadvantage marginalized communities. These practices include discriminatory housing policies that restrict where people of color can live, racial profiling that targets these communities disproportionately, disparities in educational opportunities, and the perpetuation of economic inequalities that keep wealth concentrated in white hands. Since the abolition of the formal statutes of Jim Crow, some contend that racism is in retreat. Yet, informal personal, as well as formal institutional practices and racially based behaviors, have maintained high levels of residential, school, and social segregation (Bonilla-Silva 75). By shifting the focus from systemic racism to individual actions, colorblindness allows racial disparities to persist without addressing their root causes. Colorblindness is intertwined with resentment stemming from the notion that race-based policies are no longer necessary and that any focus on racial disparities is itself a form of discrimination and perpetuates strained race relations.

Colorblind racism's impact extends into the realm of Black hair care by ignoring implicit biases. It allows the underrepresentation of Black hairstylists in predominantly White salons, which reflects broader systemic inequalities. The absence of diverse stylists means there is less expertise in and appreciation for Black hair care needs, perpetuating a cycle where Black hair

and culture are marginalized. This segregation in salon spaces is maintained by a White invisibility and meta-ignorance that arises from colorblind ideologies, which erase the unique experiences, histories, and identities of marginalized individuals. Such ideologies often avoid critical engagement with how racial differences affect lived experiences, effectively sidelining the specific needs of non-white individuals, and reinforcing the notion that Whiteness is neutral White beauty is the default. Eurocentric beauty standards implicitly suggest that Black hair, particularly worn naturally and/or in culturally specific styles, is less desirable or professional. This hair bias can manifest in various settings, including schools, workplaces, and social environments, where Black individuals may already face discrimination. Policies and practices that restrict or discourage natural hairstyles, such as afros, braids, or dreadlocks, disproportionately impact Black employees and students (NAACP, Stein, Bates). Such policies contribute to a climate where Black students are made to feel their natural hair is unwelcome or inappropriate. These biases also influence media representation which often underrepresents diverse Black hair textures and styles, again reinforcing Eurocentric beauty ideals. Limited representation can create a perception that natural Black hair is less desirable, influencing societal attitudes and potentially impacting individuals' self-esteem and sense of identity. Colorblind racism perpetuates implicit biases and microaggressions related to Black hair, and thus Black people, since if we are unwilling to attend to the unique needs and characteristics of Black individuals and their experiences as Black people, we can’t be sensitive to the ways in which we might cause harm.

The history of hair care products, cosmetology schools, and salons in the United States all have their roots in institutionalized racism, segregation, and slavery. Historical racial biases, licensing requirements, education standards, industry regulations, and discriminatory practices have contributed to barriers for Black individuals in the industry and to the segregation of salon spaces. The existence of segregated salon spaces can be viewed as a symptom of the broader patterns of legally enforced segregation in the United States. As Rothstein argues in *The Color*

of Law, the idea that residential segregation is the result of private practices and choices is only a small part of the truth (Rothstein vii). While things like private prejudice, real estate agents' influence, redlining, subprime loans, educational disparities, and personal preference among black families all have had *some* impact on residential segregation, the more impactful cause is government policies explicitly aimed at promoting segregation. Even if not explicitly mandated by law, segregation in businesses like salon spaces can be sustained by local ordinances, discriminatory licensing practices, and the economic effects of residential segregation. Segregated salon spaces are, in part, a symptom of the housing segregation that was enforced through government policies like public housing and school segregation, redlining, and racial zoning. Segregated salon spaces also serve as an example of how economic disparities between races can manifest in the marketplace. Black salons, operating in segregated or economically disadvantaged neighborhoods due to residential segregation, likely had less access to capital, fewer resources, and a clientele with lower average incomes than salons in predominantly white neighborhoods, thus perpetuating economic inequalities. Once we understand that segregation and racial disparities in one area (such as housing) can influence and reinforce segregation and disparities in other areas (like business practices), we can see that segregated salon spaces are not only the result of racism, slavery, and segregation from their founding but are also perpetuated because of the same kinds of racist, segregationist policies and practices. The existence and persistence of segregated salon spaces illustrates the lasting impact of de jure segregation and the ways in which segregation has been normalized and institutionalized across various aspects of American life, beyond just residential patterns.

The historical context of Black hair care in the United States shows that the segregation of salon spaces is not a naturally occurring phenomenon but rather a product of deliberate and systemic racial discrimination. Segregation in this sphere is rooted in long-standing racial biases and institutional practices designed to marginalize Black individuals. This history undermines

the naturalism argument by showing that the current state of segregation is not merely the result of individual choices but is deeply embedded in a legacy of racial injustice.

3. Epistemological Methodology

Epistemic Justice and Testimonies of Harm

While the naturalism argument upholds the sanctity of personal choice and freedom, it is essential to recognize that the exercise of such freedoms must not infringe upon the rights and well-being of others. As discussed in section 2.1, the naturalism argument asserts that as long as personal choices do not cause harm to others, individuals should be free to act according to their preferences, and whatever outcomes arise should not warrant intervention unless significant harm is evident. In the case of segregated salon spaces, the testimonies of Black salon clients highlight specific harms, which are often overlooked or dismissed under the guise of respecting individual preferences. In light of these testimonies, we have reason to believe that salon segregation causes, or is at least correlated with, various harm and injustices to Black people. Furthermore, the harm inflicted upon Black individuals—manifested through systemic discrimination, social exclusion, and psychological distress—is significant and thus meets the threshold for warranted intervention. The testimonies of Black salon clients reveal these harms and challenge the notion that such segregation is a benign reflection of individual preferences.

One of the key considerations in this context is epistemic injustice, which refers to unfair treatment that harms individuals by undermining their ability to share and gain knowledge. The principle of epistemic justice emphasizes the importance of recognizing and valuing the testimonies of marginalized groups. In the case of segregated salon spaces, the experiences and testimonies of Black individuals who frequent these spaces are crucial. Their accounts of harm, whether they pertain to feelings of exclusion, discrimination, or other forms of injustice, provide essential insights into the lived realities that may not be immediately visible to those

outside the community. In this chapter, I begin with a brief discussion of standpoint theory and how it relates to epistemic justice. I then claim that because of the demands of epistemic justice, we are obligated to default to a position of believing the testimony of Black people in general, and Black salon clients in particular. I claim that if Black people sharing their experiences indicate that they are experiencing harm then we have an obligation to believe that testimony, and then, in Chapter 4, I will discuss examples of such testimony.

3.1 Standpoint Theory and Epistemic Injustice

Injustices can manifest when Black individuals share their experiences, insights, or testimonies, and these are dismissed, disbelieved, or not taken seriously by others. Standpoint theory provides a framework for understanding why the testimonies of Black people and other marginalized groups are crucial for a comprehensive understanding of societal issues. Standpoint theory suggests that valuing and centering the perspectives of marginalized groups can help to correct specific kinds of injustice and argues against the idea that politics negatively affect the creation of knowledge. Standpoint theory also suggests that mainstream science and methods are not completely neutral or objective, as all knowledge is influenced by historical and social factors, and it emphasizes that oppressed groups, such as women, have unique insights that differ from mainstream views. Mainstream scientific thinkers often fail to recognize how their perspectives are shaped by their own social positions, and thus can be politically motivated. In contrast, standpoint theory argues that oppressed people can provide valuable knowledge about both themselves *and* their oppressors. This approach starts from the actual lives and experiences of the marginalized and uses their perspectives to challenge and analyze dominant ideologies (Harding 1-12).

Applying standpoint theory to the experiences and narratives of Black salon clients and Black cosmetology students recognizes the ways in which they should be acknowledged and valued as significant sources of knowledge. These individuals, by virtue of their unique position

in society, offer insights that are often overlooked or underrepresented in mainstream discussions about beauty, hair care, and the cosmetology industry. Their testimonies provide a deeper understanding of the cultural, social, and economic dimensions of hair care and beauty practices, both within the Black community, and broader society. Furthermore, standpoint theory encourages the recognition of the ways in which systemic biases and power dynamics influence knowledge production and representation. In the context of Black salon clients and cosmetology students, this means it attends to how racial and cultural biases impact not only the experiences of Black people in salon spaces but also the industry as a whole. Some of these negative impacts will turn out to be significant harms that appear in the testimonies of Black clients and students discussed in Chapter 4. The testimonies of Black salon clients and students are not just isolated stories but are interconnected with broader societal issues. These experiences reveal significant patterns of harm and exclusion that highlight the systemic nature of the challenges faced by Black individuals in the beauty industry. One clear, common thread that emerges from these testimonies is the consistent description of harm, which underscores the pervasiveness of the issues at hand. For instance, the testimonies of Black cosmetology students consistently underscore the lack of inclusivity in beauty education, highlighting a curriculum that often neglects the specific needs of Black hair. This exclusion is not an isolated issue but part of a broader pattern of neglect and marginalization that permeates the industry. The repeated accounts of harm in these testimonies emphasize that these are not merely individual grievances but indicative of systemic problems. Moreover, these testimonies point to the accessibility—or lack thereof—of products and styles that cater to Black hair. Black clients frequently report difficulties in finding salons equipped to handle their hair types, reflecting a pervasive issue in the industry's responsiveness to diverse beauty needs. This pattern of neglect is not just about individual preferences but is indicative of an industry that has historically prioritized Eurocentric beauty standards, thereby marginalizing other forms of beauty. The recurring harm described in these experiences further reinforces the need to address these

systemic issues. Additionally, the experiences of Black individuals in the beauty industry shed light on broader societal patterns of exclusion and discrimination. These testimonies reveal how systemic issues, such as racial bias and privilege, manifest in everyday interactions and professional settings. For example, Black clients often recount experiences of being denied service, receiving inferior treatment, or being subjected to microaggressions—all of which contribute to a hostile environment that reinforces broader societal inequalities. The consistent thread of harm in these accounts underscores the severity and prevalence of these issues. These patterns of harm are not limited to Black clients alone but have implications for the entire industry. The exclusion of Black beauty needs from mainstream cosmetology education, product availability, and service standards affects the development of technology, the creation of new products, and the evolution of industry practices. By recognizing and addressing these patterns, the beauty industry can move towards more inclusive standards and practices that benefit all clients, not just those from marginalized communities.

Importantly, standpoint theory advocates for critical engagement with these testimonies. It's not merely about accepting their narratives at face value but understanding them within the larger context of their social, cultural, and historical backgrounds. The perspectives of Black clients and cosmetology students, shaped by their unique experiences and social positions, offer invaluable insights into the complexities of race, culture, and identity in the realm of beauty, hair care, and beyond. Marginalized individuals and communities have unique contributions to the pool of knowledge about the ways the world works because they often are aware of the machinations, experiences, and perspectives of the dominant culture as well as their perspectives and experiences. What this means in the case of salon spaces is that the testimonies of Black clients and students are informed by an awareness of historical bias, how White stylists are socially situated, how their social situatedness affects the ways that others interact with them, how beauty bias and discrimination carters perceptions, *as well as* informed by their individual perspectives. By acknowledging and critically engaging with these

testimonies, we gain a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the beauty industry and its impact on different cultures and communities, both marginalized *and* dominant.

Standpoint theory has been the subject of significant debate and critique. One major critique challenges the assumption that the experiences of a particular marginalized group can be generalized to represent all members of that group (Bowell §7). This critique highlights the danger of oversimplifying diverse experiences within any marginalized community. Another critical debate is around epistemic relativism, which argues that standpoint theory can lead to the problematic view that all perspectives are equally valid, thereby undermining the possibility of objective knowledge (Harding 10). Other critiques suggest a contradiction within standpoint theory: if all knowledge is socially situated and thus biased, then standpoint theory itself must also be biased, which questions its epistemic credibility and validity (Bowell §7). Despite these controversies, I am drawing on a relatively weak version of standpoint theory in my analysis which acknowledges the epistemic significance of marginalized perspectives without necessitating engagement in the deeper philosophical disputes.

3.2 Epistemic Injustices

The testimonies of individuals experiencing the effects of a segregated salon industry include reports of hardships and harm. It is important to trust that testimony so as not to inflict (further) harm to the individuals reporting harm in the first place. Not only does this trust acknowledge that Black individuals are epistemically best positioned to have knowledge of their own experiences in salon spaces and that they will have a unique and informative standpoint to offer, but believing the testimonies of Black people describing their experiences with racism, helps to counteract the White history of undermining Black credibility, and helps to prevent further injustice. Contributory injustices are a particular type of epistemic injustice that can result from denying the veracity of Black testimony. By assuming the veracity of the testimonies I've collected and by taking them to be descriptions of serious harm, I hope to avoid doing further

harm in the form of contributory injustice and show why believing the testimonies of Black clients is important. For that reason, and because the testimonies of harm also include examples of epistemic injustice, a discussion of epistemic injustice is warranted. In what follows, I will explain what constitutes a contributory injustice, and how believing the testimonies of Black clients and students avoids this kind of epistemic injustice. Contributory injustices are related to both hermeneutical injustices and testimonial injustices, so I begin with a brief discussion of epistemic injustice in general, followed by discussions of testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice before moving on to contributory injustices and how the testimony of Black salon clients and students relates.

Epistemic injustice is an injustice that harms someone in their capacity as a knower (Fricker 1). The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice defines epistemic injustice as referring “to those forms of unfair treatment that relate to issues of knowledge, understanding, and participation in communicative practices” (Kidd et al. 1). Epistemic injustices can include things like silencing, exclusion, and distortion of contributions to meaning-making and knowledge production (Kidd et al.1). So when a member of a marginalized group has a difficult time having their contributions taken seriously due to prejudices towards members of that group, they suffer an epistemic injustice. A standard example of epistemic injustice is the difficulty women often have with not being taken seriously or not having their ideas heard in male-dominated professional settings; if there are unconscious (or conscious) biases on the part of the listener, the woman in this example suffers an epistemic injustice. Another example of epistemic injustice is the ways in which women are often seen as irrational or naive by medical professionals based on their gender. Similarly, one might also think of the prejudices people of color face when reporting illnesses to their physicians, or when giving testimony to a judge or police officer. We can see that just as one individual can be marginalized along multiple axes, as a Black person, and as a woman, for example, one can also suffer epistemic injustices because of multiple prejudices or biases. A Black woman might find herself facing epistemic injustice at

the doctor's office, both because of the prejudiced thinking the doctor has about, say, Black people's ability to tolerate pain, and facing epistemic injustice because of the physician's prejudiced beliefs about women's tendency to be overly emotional. In this example, the patient is subject to epistemic injustice both as a Black person and as a woman. One individual might also experience multiple kinds of epistemic injustice. Fricker categorizes epistemic injustice into two types: testimonial injustice, “in which someone is wronged in their capacity as a giver of knowledge; and hermeneutical injustice, “in which someone is wronged in their capacity as a subject of social understanding” (Fricker 7). A third kind of epistemic injustice, introduced by Kristie Dotson, is contributory injustice in which someone is wronged in their capacity as an epistemic agent due to wilful hermeneutical ignorance (Dotson 32).

3.2.1 Testimonial Injustice

Testimonial injustice is what Fricker calls the primary form of epistemic injustice and occurs when prejudice causes the receiver of testimony to give the speaker less credibility than they otherwise would have (Fricker 4). When we participate in a social exchange as a listener and/or a receiver of testimony, we generally need to apply some kind of rough-and-ready heuristic for assessing the other person's credibility as a speaker. For example, if we know some facts about the speaker personally, such as their general knowledge of the topic, their history of truth-telling, etc, we might employ those ideas in our quick epistemic credibility assessment. Epistemic credibility judgments can also come from unconscious biases stemming from a particular kind of social power called identity power. Social power, according to Fricker, is a “socially situated capacity to control others’ actions, where this capacity may be exercised either actively or passively by particular social agents, or alternatively, it may operate purely structurally” (Fricker 13). Social power that is structural in nature controls the actions of some social group in some way, negative, neutral, or positive, even though no one particular agent is doing the controlling. Fricker uses the example of an informally disenfranchised group

that for some complex set of social reasons, tends not to vote. There is no single agent responsible, yet it is still the social power structure that excludes them (Fricker 10). Whenever there is an operation of social power that depends on individuals having shared imaginative concepts of social identity, like what it means within a particular society to be a non-binary, elderly, of a certain religion, social class, etc., Fricker says identity power is at work (Fricker 14). An example of gender identity power at work is when a woman feels unable or hesitant to contribute to a discussion in a male-dominated workplace in a society that generally attributes more worth to the contributions of men. This passive application of identity power silences the woman without the man having to even be aware of the situation (Fricker 14). Identity power is a result of some shared imagined social structure and as such can influence the heuristics with which we assess epistemic credibility, and in doing so, cause a testimonial injustice to occur.

The particular kind of testimonial injustice that I am concerned with comes from negative identity prejudices, in which the hearer fails to give credibility to the speaker based on some feature or features of their social identity (Fricker 28). It is important to keep in mind that these negative identity prejudices need not, and often do not, Fricker thinks, stem from conscious beliefs on the part of the hearer, but also happen due to unconscious stereotypes that affect our social interactions (Fricker 36). Research suggests that people can act based on stereotypes without intending to do so, or being aware that they have done so (Brownstein 1.2). When we allow negative identity prejudices to influence our assessment of disenfranchised speaker’s epistemic credibility, we can cause at least two basic kinds of harm: Harm to the overall epistemic practice and harm to the speaker themselves.

Testimonial injustices can harm both the hearer and/or the overall epistemic practice by barring access to knowledge and the circulation of critical ideas. When negative identity prejudices prevent us from taking on new information about the way the world works, we are at an epistemic disadvantage concerning truths about the world, and concerning truths about other people's experiences in the world. Imagine that I am a team leader in a corporate

office and that I believe that in the vast majority of cases when women worry that they aren't being heard by their peers or superiors, they are worrying only because being overly emotional and overreacting is something women are prone to do. In this case, I might think that women's contributions in the workplace are almost always valued, respected, and acknowledged just as much as men's contributions. If this is how I view the situation, I will undervalue testimony about women's experiences in my workplace, and as such I will have an incorrectly skewed view of my workplace culture. Assuming that having the correct facts about the world is important, this causes me to be at an epistemic disadvantage. Furthermore, if I don't think there is a need to correct for the difficulties women claim they face in getting their ideas heard, I miss out on ideas and information because I assume that all contributions are equally making their way to me. This results in an incomplete and/or incorrect epistemic picture. Furthermore, I will end up perpetuating the system where critical ideas and knowledge are prevented from entering the overall epistemic practice of a community or society because I make it harder for those ideas to be heard by a new audience.

Testimonial injustices can also directly harm the speaker on the receiving end of the testimonial injustice by harming them in their capacity as givers of knowledge (Fricker 43). A person's capacity as a "giver of knowledge" is an aspect of their capacity for reason, according to Fricker, and the capacity to reason is the quality that we think gives humanity its distinctive value. Testimonial injustices harm the speaker because they diminish their capacity as givers of knowledge, and as such, also their capacity to reason. So when we undermine or undervalue someone's capacity as a giver of knowledge, we also, at the very least symbolically, undervalue or undermine their humanity (Fricker 44). Harm to an individual in a capacity that is essential to their human value is an intrinsic injustice, according to Fricker, and though the harm can be more or less psychologically harmful. When it is more harmful, it can even go so far as to hinder self-development and growth (Fricker 5). So if the capacity to reason is essential to our humanity, and we think of our capacity to reason as something that doesn't happen in a vacuum

but rather involves the sharing of ideas, and communication with other rational thinkers, then disregarding the epistemic contributions of an individual harms them intrinsically, as a giver of knowledge.

3.2.2 Contributory Injustices

Before delving into the concept of contributory injustice, it is essential to first understand hermeneutical injustice. Testimonial injustices are mostly agential, occurring when the speaker's credibility is undermined due to an agent's negative identity prejudices, harming them as a giver of knowledge (Fricker 43). However, epistemic injustices can also be structural. Hermeneutical injustice, a type of structural epistemic injustice described by Fricker, occurs when individuals are wronged in their capacity as subjects of social understanding due to gaps in the collective interpretive resources stemming from structural-identity prejudice (Fricker 7). By first examining hermeneutical injustice, we can better appreciate how contributory injustice arises when existing resources are ignored or dismissed by dominant groups, leading to further marginalization and harm.

Hermeneutical resources are the collective tools of social interpretation; the shared meanings a culture uses to understand and communicate their experiences of the world. Hermeneutical injustice occurs when, due to structural-identity prejudices, one is unable to understand and/or articulate an experience, and thus, is excluded from epistemic participation. Some examples of hermeneutical injustice are cases where an individual is attempting to explain a lived experience like sexual harassment, misogyny, microaggression, transphobia, and the like, but the collective interpretive resources have not yet created language or concepts to interpret what the speaker is feeling or trying to convey. Fricker uses the example of a woman suffering sexual harassment before the time that we had the concept of "sexual harassment" with which to interpret her experience. She may understand that what she is experiencing

doesn’t feel right, but not have the words to explain exactly why it isn't right, due to a gap in hermeneutical resources (Fricker 6).

The disadvantage created by this gap weighs more heavily on marginalized social groups because they are often less able to participate in creating the shared social meanings used by the dominant groups in their society in the first place. This hermeneutical marginalization results in a pool of hermeneutical resources that are mostly shaped by the dominant group or groups in a culture or society, and because the language and concepts the dominant group uses to describe their experiences aren’t reflective of marginalized groups within that society, marginalized individuals are harmed in their capacity as subjects of social understanding by members of the dominant groups.

Though there might be a collection of some hermeneutical resources that are shared by all members of society, it is not the case that there is only one set of hermeneutical resources to be used. Just like there is a plurality of societies and cultures to which we each belong, there is a plurality of hermeneutical resource pools to contribute to and draw from. But importantly, those in dominant groups lack the experiences to consider concepts that others might work with daily, furthermore, our privilege and power make it so that we aren’t compelled to learn the concepts that are available to other sub-cultures and groups (Hanel §4). Marginalized individuals will often find their contributions “improperly heard, deemed deficient, reinterpreted, distorted, and too quickly dismissed, and in these ways, they are hermeneutically disrespected and wronged. (Medina 44). So it is often the case that the resources are there, but those in positions of power are often unwilling to hear them used, and systems of oppressive power are such that minority groups are unable to contribute to the resource pool being used by those in power. Contributory injustice is the term used to describe these sorts of scenarios, where there is no gap in the hermeneutical resources (like with hermeneutical injustice), instead, the resources are present and available, but they have not gained uptake by the dominant social group because of the marginalization of those who created the resources in the first place. Marginalized groups

regularly create and use their own sets of epistemic resources to make sense of and communicate their experiences of the world, especially those experiences that are different from those of socially dominant group members (Dotson 32). Contributory injustices happen when a marginalized knower is prevented from contributing to the dominant group's pool of epistemic resources due to the agent's (hearer's) use of structurally prejudiced hermeneutical resources, and their willful ignorance of alternative resources (Dotson 32). In other words, the marginalized speaker has no problem understanding their own experiences and describing them, but due to willful ignorance on the part of the hearer, the marginalized individual's testimony is not taken seriously, and contributory injustice occurs. In this way, contributory injustice compromises the epistemic agency of a knower.

Disregarding the testimony of individuals' experiences of the world, in general, puts us at a high risk of causing epistemic harm by committing an epistemic injustice. However, Black individuals are *especially likely* to have their testimony disregarded or undervalued due to negative identity prejudices. This problem is compounded for Black women who are marginalized along at least two axes; because they are women and because they are Black. A commitment to epistemic justice, therefore, requires a strong presumption in favor of trusting the testimony of Black individuals about their experiences. Furthermore, a commitment to understanding truths about that world requires believing the veracity of these kinds of testimonies since Black individuals are uniquely positioned to have access to truths about the world that White individuals are not. It is important, then, to have a presumption of trust regarding the testimony of Black individuals reporting experiences in segregated salon spaces as harmful, so as not to cause or perpetuate epistemic injustice and to have a more complete understanding of the situation.

So far, I have argued that there is segregation in the salon industry, that is, that salon spaces are generally largely divided by race; Black people tend to patronize salon spaces with Black practitioners, and White people tend to patronize salon spaces with White practitioners. I

have established one set of conditions under which we would be right to conclude that the segregation is harmful—namely if Black people say it is harmful. In Chapter 4, I will discuss the testimonies of Black individuals who describe instances of harm due to the segregated nature of salon spaces.

4. Testimonies and Examples of Harm

The testimonies of individuals experiencing the effects of a segregated salon industry include a wide range of hardships and harm. In general, there seems to be a common theme of black clients feeling like the techniques and services required for caring for their hair are not practiced in White salon spaces, nor seen by white stylists as worth knowing about. Both of these contribute not only to a general sense that they, themselves, are not viewed as worth knowing about but also other types of harm, both physical and psychological. In what follows, I identify recurring themes of 5 different types of harm: Epistemic, material, executive, identity, and, systemic harms. Each type of harm has distinct characteristics, yet they often intersect and reinforce each other, compounding the overall experience of injustice for Black individuals in segregated salon spaces.

4.1 Epistemic Harms

In earlier sections, I discussed the concept of epistemic injustice and our obligation to believe the testimonies of marginalized groups, particularly Black individuals, due to the demands of epistemic justice. The testimonies discussed first in this chapter specifically describe instances of epistemic harm, such as testimonial quieting, testimonial smothering, and contributory injustice, as they occur in everyday salon interactions. These testimonies highlight the ways in which societal and cultural biases against textured hair, Black hair, and Black people undermine the ability of Black individuals to convey their experiences and knowledge effectively. This is particularly significant because failing to believe these testimonies can result in a

doubling of harm: the initial epistemic harm experienced by the individuals in the salon setting, and additional epistemic harm when their accounts of those experiences are dismissed or undervalued. Thus, acknowledging and addressing these testimonies is not only a matter of justice but also a necessary step to prevent multiple layers of epistemic harm.

4.1.1 Testimonial Quieting

While testimonial injustice encompasses any scenario where a speaker's credibility is unjustly deflated, testimonial quieting a term introduced by Kristie Dotson, refers to a more specific phenomenon within the broader category of testimonial injustice. It occurs when a speaker is silenced or their testimony is ignored because the hearer preemptively judges that the speaker will not provide valuable or credible knowledge. This often happens because the hearer does not recognize the speaker as a potential source of knowledge due to prejudiced assumptions about the speaker. A speaker needs an audience to identify, or at least recognize, her as a knower in order to offer testimony (Dotson 242). When certain social groups are viewed as having a lack of credibility due to identity stereotypes, a specific kind of ignorance occurs. In this case, the willful ignorance of Black women, in particular, and their capacity and reliability as knowers results in an instance of testimonial quieting (Tuana 13).

In the salon space context, testimonial quieting can happen when stylists do not recognize clients as knowers of their own hair, ignoring their expertise about their personal hair care needs. This is particularly evident in interactions where stylists, often due to racial or cultural biases, dismiss the concerns or requests of clients with hair types different from their own. The refusal to acknowledge the client’s knowledge not only undermines the client's credibility but also reinforces harmful stereotypes, contributing to a sense of invisibility and marginalization. One Reddit user responding to a post asking whether or not Black readers would ever see a white stylist said, “Every time I’d have someone White do my hair they’d absolutely insist they can do my hair and it’d either end in them ruining my hair or stopping

halfway through…I was called a racist when I asked for my money back and I kinda gave up after that. I only go to Black salons now" (Reddit workaccchi). The repeated failure of White hairstylists to properly handle the speaker's 3c hair type—despite their insistence on their ability to do so—demonstrates a refusal to recognize the speaker as a knower of their own hair needs. The situation escalates to the speaker being labeled as racist for expressing dissatisfaction, further silencing their testimony and negating their lived experience. A number of the testimonies I read describe similar experiences, instances where a Black client expresses concern regarding the treatment of their hair or the words used to describe it, and those concerns are dismissed by the stylist.[31] This dismissal is rooted in racial stereotypes and a lack of credibility extended to the speaker, reflecting willful ignorance on the part of the hairstylists.

4.1.2 Testimonial Smothering

Related to testimonial quieting is what Dotson terms testimonial smothering. Testimonial smothering occurs when the speaker alters or truncates their *own* testimony because they perceive the audience as unable or unwilling to appropriately interpret the testimony given. This smothering often happens when the speaker not only worries that the audience will find their testimony unintelligible, but also that in doing so, there is a risk of the audience forming false beliefs that can cause social, political, and/or material harm (Dotson 244). A client may truncate their testimony to ensure that the testimony contains only content for which their audience demonstrates testimonial competence. Examples of testimonial smothering in salon space include instances where Black clients, after receiving poor services, experiencing racial microaggressions, or after being turned away entirely are self-censoring for fear that their words won't be believed or taken seriously.

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[31] foe example, Reddit user workaccchi describes being called racist for wanting her money back after having her scalp burned but an inexperienced white stylist. Reddit, "R/Askwomen - Black Women,What Has Been Your Experience Going to a White Hair Salon or Having a White Hair Dresser?," Reddit, https://www.reddit.com/r/AskWomen/comments/7de1wq/black_womenwhat_has_been_your_experience_going_to/.

Testimonial smothering occurs when clients feel compelled to alter or withhold their true preferences or feedback due to anticipation that their stylist will not understand or value their input. This self-censorship often stems from past negative experiences, leading individuals to adjust their expectations and the way they communicate to avoid further misunderstanding, discomfort, or harm. In salon scenarios, this can mean accepting a hairstyle that does not reflect one's identity or preference, or not voicing dissatisfaction with a service, to navigate a space or situation where their knowledge and experience are not respected. In many testimonies there were elements of testimonial smothering, where the speakers adjust their expectations and how they communicate their hair care needs based on past negative experiences. We saw earlier an example where, after numerous attempts to have her hair styled at white salons, a Black client decides to frequent only Black salons, adjusting her testimony by giving up on trying to explain her needs in environments that repeatedly misinterpret and mishandle her requests. Another speaker's account of having her hair inappropriately thinned and straightened, despite the desire to embrace her natural curl, reflects a smothering of her preferences to avoid conflict or further misunderstanding: "I never really left with what I wanted because I think their goal was to shrink and flatten my hair as much as possible when that's the opposite of what I've wanted ever since I began to embrace my curls" (Reddit ChocolateChippo). In this testimony, the client feels compelled to alter or suppress their testimony due to anticipating that the stylist will not be able or willing to understand or hear their preferences. This alteration or suppression of one's preferences or requests is a defensive mechanism, often employed by marginalized individuals who feel that their voices are systematically devalued or dismissed in various social contexts, and is aimed at avoiding further harm.

4.1.3 Contributory Injustice

Many salon space testimonies also illustrate contributory injustice when the unique insights and contributions of clients, particularly those from marginalized groups, are

undervalued or ignored. This injustice occurs when the shared understanding of hair care is dominated by a limited perspective that does not accommodate diversity. Clients' contributions to knowledge about diverse hair types and care practices are essential for expanding the collective understanding, but when these contributions are dismissed, it not only perpetuates ignorance but also marginalizes those who could provide valuable insights, further entrenching epistemic exclusions and knowledge gaps. Contributory injustice can occur in salon spaces when clients or students explain their experiences to the stylists or management of a salon, to friends and family, or on social media, and members of the dominant social group deny the contribution to the narrative due to their willful ignorance. Contributory injustice is evident in the already discussed testimonies from Reddit, in that there occurred a preemptive dismissal of the speakers' knowledge and expertise about their own hair, which undermines their contributions to a shared understanding of diverse hair care needs. Their experiences are marginalized, limiting their ability to contribute to a broader understanding that could enrich the collective knowledge pool regarding hair diversity and care. The stylists’ actions—rooted in prejudice and a lack of willingness to learn from their clients—preemptively deflated the speakers' credibility, excluding their contributions before they could even be fully expressed or considered.

The kinds of contributory injustice shared in these testimonies also point to hermeneutical marginalization. This is related to Fricker's hermeneutical injustice, where there is a gap in collective interpretive resources that leaves some individuals unable to make sense of their experiences. When there is unequal hermeneutical participation concerning some significant area(s) of social experience, members of the disadvantaged group are hermeneutically marginalized (Fricker 153). Individuals can be marginalized from contributing to the collective hermeneutical resources, thereby exacerbating the epistemic exclusion. This type of marginalization is often a result of the dominant group in society controlling the creation and dissemination of knowledge, which shapes the interpretive resources available. As a result, the experiences of marginalized groups may be misunderstood, overlooked, or undervalued by the

dominant group because the language, concepts, and frameworks necessary to articulate these experiences are overlooked by the dominant group (Dotson, Limiting 31-32, Fricker 153-159). The lack of a shared language or understanding of diverse hair care needs, especially in environments that predominantly cater to white hair types, leaves individuals struggling to articulate their experiences and needs to those who don't (or won't) share their hermeneutical resources. This gap in collective interpretive resources exacerbates their epistemic exclusion, as their attempts to communicate their specific needs are either misunderstood, dismissed, or ignored.

4.1.4 Epistemic Exploitation

Epistemic exploitation occurs when “privileged persons compel marginalized persons to educate them about the nature of their oppression” (Berenstain 570). This form of exploitation is a specific type of epistemic oppression characterized by labor that is forced, emotionally draining, uncompensated, and unrecognized. It perpetuates existing systems of oppression by prioritizing the interests of the dominant group and exploiting the emotional and intellectual labor of marginalized individuals. These individuals are expected to provide unpaid and often unacknowledged work in educating privileged persons about the oppressive systems from which these privileged individuals benefit (Berenstain 569-70). Epistemic exploitation in salon spaces happens when Black students are called on to educate their peers and even instructors about textured hair, despite this being the institution's responsibility. This situation arises due to systemic gaps in the curriculum that fail to adequately cover the care, styling, and science of textured hair types.

Black students often find themselves in positions where they must act as the primary source of knowledge on textured hair for their peers and instructors. For example, Brittany Smith, one of only three Black students in her school, recounted how she ended up teaching the class on braids, sew-ins, and wash-and-go styles, due to the instructors' insistence that if the

Black students didn’t teach these techniques, no one would learn. Complaints about this unfair burden were dismissed with excuses about the lack of necessary teaching staff and the classification of textured hair techniques as "extra," effectively forcing Black students into a teaching role without recognition or compensation (Marsh). Similar experiences highlight the reluctance or inability of instructors and non-Black students to engage with textured hair, resulting in Black students being the default choice for servicing Black clients, with White students servicing only straight silky textures of hair. This not only demonstrates systemic neglect of textured hair education within the curriculum but also places an undue educational and practical burden on Black students. Requiring Black students to perform unpaid and unrecognized labor under the guise of necessity maintains oppressive structures by centering the learning needs of non-Black students while exploiting the emotional and cognitive labor of Black students, who are coerced into filling educational gaps without acknowledgment or compensation. The Black student might feel compelled to teach their peers due to the gaps in the curriculum or to prevent the perpetuation of harmful practices and misunderstandings about Black hair. Students might also experience a sort of double bind, where *not* teaching their peers results in continued ignorance and perpetuation of harmful practices, but teaching them places an additional burden on their shoulders. This results in a no-win situation where either choice has an unwanted cost. Furthermore, teaching about Black hair is not merely a technical exercise; it involves navigating cultural sensitivities, debunking stereotypes, and sometimes addressing deeply ingrained biases. This can be emotionally taxing, especially in environments where such discussions may evoke defensive responses, skepticism, or racism, thus opening themselves to the possibility of additional kinds of harm, such as testimonial quieting or smothering, identity harms, and/or executive harms.

4.2 Material Harms

Some testimonies describe instances of material harm. Material harms broadly speaking refer to tangible, physical, or economic damages or disadvantages that can impact a person's well-being, financial status, property, health, or access to resources and opportunities.[32] In the salon space, these are experiences that extend beyond mere dissatisfaction with a service; they encompass things like physical damage to Black bodies via hair and scalp, extra economic burdens, and potential professional or social implications. Additionally, the lack of competency can also translate to higher costs for Black women. Of the stylists surveyed, 63% of white stylists, and 46% of Black stylists said they feel it is fair to charge extra to style textured hair. 86% of Black women reported challenges in finding consistent, quality haircare at salons, they reported facing difficulties including bias and discrimination. However, the cost of education is a significant barrier, with two-thirds of stylists spending $5,000 or more on the additional training.

4.2.1 Damage to Black Bodies

Black clients at salons can face a range of damage to their hair and scalp/skin, largely due to improper handling, lack of knowledge about textured hair care, or use of inappropriate products and techniques. Damage to the scalp and hairline can stem from improper application of chemical relaxers or other treatments that are almost exclusively used on very textured hair which can cause burns to the scalp, leading to painful lesions, scabs, and in severe cases, permanent scarring or hair loss. Tight hairstyles that pull on the hair, such as braids or weaves, can lead to thinning hair if done repeatedly or too tightly. This condition can turn into traction alopecia, which is permanent balding from damaged hair follicles. Damage to the hair itself can stem from incorrect use of styling tools like combs and brushes, or techniques for detangling

[32] While I could not find a definition of ‘material harm’, broadly construed, this definition seems to encompass the kinds of harms that fall under this category as it is contrasted with emotional or psychological harm.

and styling which can lead to hair breakage. Textured hair requires gentle handling and specific tools and techniques to minimize breakage. Over-processing with chemicals, such as relaxers or dyes, can weaken the hair shaft, leading to brittleness, breakage, and irreversible damage to the hair's natural texture. Excessive or improper use of heat styling tools (flat irons, hot combs, blow dryers, etc.) can lead to heat damage, altering the natural curl pattern of the hair and making it prone to dryness and breakage, or even damage the hair so much that if burns off during the service.

One testimony recounts a severe incident where the use of a relaxer by an unskilled white stylist resulted in a burnt scalp, causing bleeding and significant hair loss. This instance of physical harm directly resulted from improper handling of chemical treatments, showcasing a lack of knowledge and skill in treating textured hair, with long-term consequences for the individual's scalp health and hair growth (Reddit workaccchi). Other testimonies describe instances where textured hair was “butchered,” unevenly cut, or aggressively handled, leading to physical damage such as breakage and dryness (Reddit BeatrixQuix, Anonymous, workaccchi). These incidents stem from a lack of understanding and expertise in managing textured hair, which causes direct material harm to the scalp, the hair's integrity, and the individual's appearance. Incidents like these not only cause immediate physical pain and injury but also have lasting effects on the individual's hair and scalp health. While hair growth rates can vary widely among individuals, the perceived growth rate of Black hair may be slower due to shrinkage—a term used to describe the significant reduction in visible length when curly or coily hair goes from wet to dry. This shrinkage, combined with the susceptibility to breakage, can make textured hair take longer to recover from damage. To properly recover from severe trauma to the hair or scalp, the delicate hair should be left alone and the scalp should be allowed to breathe and heal. This means the more damage there is to the scalp and hair, the less protective “protective” styles (like braids and wigs) are for long-term hair health, and the less

control the client has over their appearance. While no one likes to have a bad cut or chemical service result, the ramifications for Black clients can be much more severe than for others.

4.2.2 Social and Economic Damages

Damaging the hair of Black clients is *particularly* harmful due to factors like social pressure to have long straight hair, the economic pressures Black people face to have certain styles of hair (Mullen, Isser), the history of racial profiling based on hairstyles,[33] and some of the other ways in which Black hair has special cultural, social, and economic significance. Negative attitudes towards Black hair can lead to significant social and economic damage for Black individuals. Socially, these attitudes can result in exclusion, stigmatization, and cultural alienation, as Black people can often face ridicule and discrimination for their hair texture and styles. Economically, these biases can manifest as employment discrimination, where natural hairstyles are often deemed unprofessional, leading to fewer job opportunities and career advancements, and punitive measures in educational settings disrupt academic progress. Thus, societal prejudices against Black hair perpetuate systemic inequalities and hinder both social inclusion and economic mobility for Black individuals.

Social Damages

As discussed earlier, the "Good Hair" Study, conducted by Perception Institute in 2016, investigated attitudes toward Black women's hair, particularly focusing on the perception of textured (natural) versus smooth hair. The study found both explicit and implicit bias against textured hair. White women and men, as well as Black men, demonstrated a preference for smooth hair over textured hair in terms of both ideas of beauty and social preference. This bias is significant because it correlates with discriminatory behavior, such as rejection, avoidance,

[33] Karen Grigsby Bates, “New Evidence Shows There’s Still Bias against Black Natural Hair,” *NPR*, February 6, 2017; Megan Gray, “Criminal Case Dropped as State Trooper Faces Racial Profiling Allegations,” *Press Herald*; David A Harris, “Racial Profiling: Past, Present, and Future?,” *Americanbar.Org*, accessed March 24, 2022; John McWhorter, “Driving While Dreadlocked: Why Police Are so Bad at Racial Profiling,” The New Republic; Sophia A. Nelson, “Wright, Nazario Cases Show We Have a Serious Racial Profiling Problem,” USA Today, April 15, 2021.

and abuse, raising concerns about discrimination against Black women who wear their hair natural (McGill Johnson). Negative salon experiences can reinforce the social stigma against textured hair. When a Black person seeks professional hair care and ends up with a damaging or unsatisfactory result, it not only alters the individual's appearance but also perpetuates the societal bias that textured hair is difficult to manage or inherently less beautiful. Black women already experience higher levels of anxiety related to their hair compared to white women (McGill Johnson), and negative salon experiences can exacerbate this anxiety, making the process of hair care a source of stress and worry. This is particularly impactful considering the societal pressures Black women face to conform to Eurocentric beauty standards, which often dictate smooth hair as the ideal. This pressure is not just about aesthetics but is deeply intertwined with racial, cultural, and historical contexts, affecting Black individuals' self-esteem, sense of belonging, and even their social mobility. In this light, the significance of avoiding negative salon experiences is more than mere aesthetics or personal preference for Black individuals; it intersects with broader issues of social acceptance, and resistance to discriminatory norms.

Professional Damages

Material harm in salon spaces can also come in the form of economic and professional implications, as individuals who do not conform to dominant beauty standards may face not only social discrimination but also discrimination in the workplace or other areas of public life, where certain hairstyles are deemed unacceptable. According to the NAACP, “For many Black people, altering the texture of their hair is considered essential to both social and economic success. Hair straightening has long been seen as a way to assimilate to a Eurocentric environment and make those unfamiliar with Black hair more comfortable with their presence” (NAACP). A 2020 study titled "The Natural Hair Bias in Job Recruitment" explored the influence of natural hairstyles on the job recruitment process, particularly for Black women. The study found a clear bias against Black women with natural hairstyles in job recruitment settings. Across four studies,

it was demonstrated that Black women with natural hairstyles were perceived as less professional, less competent, and less likely to be recommended for a job interview compared to Black women with straightened hairstyles and White women with either curly or straight hairstyles. The perceived professionalism and competence of Black women were significantly affected by their hairstyle choices (Koval). This creates a barrier to employment and advancement for those who wear natural hairstyles, limiting their economic opportunities and reinforcing systemic inequalities in the workplace. When textured hair sustains damage it can become challenging to achieve a smooth or straight appearance, as well as difficult to create curls that are “defined” and look “tidy.” This difficulty persists until the damaged hair either grows out or improves enough to be effectively hidden under wigs or through protective styling. In other words, damage to the hair or scalp can affect the ability to present natural hair in a manner that is deemed acceptable by society and/or to wear straightened styles effectively, both of which can affect Black individuals' access to economic opportunities like professional advancement or job offers.

Another place harm manifests due to the segregation of salon spaces is in the hair and make-up departments of the television and film industries. Hair and makeup departments have recently faced public criticism for a pervasive diversity problem, which, of course, reflects broader systemic issues (Baze Mpinja). Within this sector, the lack of professionals trained to work with a variety of hair textures and skin tones not only affects the on-screen representation of Black actors but also has significant financial implications for Black stylists and makeup artists. These professionals often face barriers to entry and limited opportunities in an industry that has historically favored stylists with experience catering to non-textured hair types and lighter skin tones. This systemic bias restricts the hiring pool, sidelining Black stylists who possess the skills and expertise to work with textured hair. As a result, these individuals miss out on lucrative jobs and career advancement opportunities within mainstream media productions, perpetuating economic disparities within the beauty and styling profession.

Economic Damages

The existence of a persistent wage gap affecting female workers in the United States is widely recognized. This gap broadens further when factors such as race, industry, age, and geographic location are considered. There is another pervasive expectation related to women's appearance in the workplace, termed the "grooming gap," which incurs its own financial implications. This concept captures the societal standards related to grooming and appearance for women, highlighting the significant time and financial resources women must invest to meet these standards and the tangible impact on their lives (Isser 2020). The grooming gap's effects are amplified for Black women due to intersecting racial and gender inequities. Black women are already navigating a complex landscape of discrimination and bias. The grooming gap adds another layer of inequality, with the expectations around appearance serving as another avenue through which racial and gender discrimination manifest. The requirement to conform to mainstream beauty standards often means investing in expensive hair treatments like relaxers, weaves, and other hair care products to achieve a look deemed "professional" or attractive, in a way that is aligned with Eurocentric standards of beauty. Black women face an enormous financial burden due to the grooming gap, with Black women spending significantly more on hair and beauty products than their counterparts (McGill Johnson). The grooming gap also translates into a significant time investment, with Black women spending considerable time on hair and beauty routines. For many Black women, this burden is not merely a choice but a necessity in order to navigate professional and social spaces.

The additional financial and non-financial burdens placed on Black consumers due to systemic inequalities and discriminatory practices is what is sometimes referred to as the “Black tax”. This term encapsulates a range of challenges that Black individuals face when purchasing beauty and hair care products or services, which often come with hidden costs not experienced by their non-Black counterparts. These extra costs can be direct, such as higher prices for products tailored to Black hair and skin, or indirect, including the time and resources spent

searching for suitable products and services. Black consumers often pay more for hair care products and beauty items designed for their specific needs. Limited availability can require delivery fees and markups, the niche marketing of these products can drive up prices, and a lack of mainstream textured hair care support can mean Black individuals need to experiment more with products and styling than do those with straighter textures. Black women spend $473 million U.S. on hair care annually whereas white women spend 9 times less than this amount. (Marshall 2020). Some of this is due to the pressure to conform to Eurocentric beauty standards and professional norms, which often require more financial investment than natural styles. But there are also instances where Black customers are charged additional fees for services that their White counterparts are not. The experience of Khalisa Rae Thompson at an Aveda salon in Raleigh, N.C., is just one example of the extra fees that are frequently imposed on Black clients due to their hair texture, perceived or actual. Despite being a patron of various Aveda salons for 15 years, Thompson encountered an unexpected and discriminatory "texture fee" for the first time, which was justified by the salon as being “for the extra product.”. Thompson noted that White customers, of Aveda salons and others, acknowledged never facing such a fee, highlighting the fact that this was, in fact, a discriminatory policy (Diversity Inc). It should be noted here that working on textured hair can require a fair amount of product, but it certainly doesn’t need to, and wavy, curly, and straight hair can take just as much, if not more product to style than coily or very textured hair. Another responder on Reddit r/askwomen described her stylist as “being terrified of her ‘fro” after exposing her natural texture at the shampoo bowl and then being charged $150 for the subsequent blowout and flat ironing even though it was advertised at only $50-65 on the salon's menu (Reddit kailan). Apart from the economic burden, the Black tax can also compromise the mental health and social experience of Black consumers, potentially leading to increased stress, anxiety, and feelings of alienation and exclusion in shopping settings. This segues into the broader consequences of the grooming gap, which are not limited to the monetary costs associated with hair care products and

services. Indeed, they signify a broader systemic encroachment on the executive functions of Black women.

4.3 Executive Harms

The implications of this grooming gap extend far beyond financial expenditures on hair treatments and products; they represent a systemic imposition on Black individuals in the form of executive harm. Executive harms are what I'm calling the extra burdens and obstacles that Black individuals face in the course of everyday activities, and in particular, seeking hair care in salon spaces. Executive in this context refers to the processes required for or involved in carrying out one's goals or desires. In the context of segregated salons, executive harm might occur when Black clients face practical difficulties in receiving appropriate hair care. These harms often manifest as increased time and effort required to achieve the same outcomes as others. Black individuals may need to invest significantly more time and resources into hair care to meet societal standards or personal preferences, due to the unavailability of knowledgeable stylists or appropriate services in mainstream salons. This might involve having to extensively research and travel to find a salon that can handle their hair type, leading to significant time, effort, and financial costs. These harms may also encompass additional administrative or logistical burdens. For instance, Black employees might face stricter dress codes or grooming policies that require them to alter their natural hair, leading to extra steps and compliance efforts that others do not have to consider. One subset of executive harm that is often discussed is harm to executive functions. Executive functions, encompassing planning, decision-making, and task management, are disproportionately taxed in Black communities, particularly among Black clients seeking salon services that cater to their hair type. The quest for a hairstylist skilled in caring for textured hair often involves extensive research, phone calls, and potentially long commutes—all of which demand a significant expenditure of mental energy, money, and time, expenditures that White salon clients do not have to make.

In many ways, all of the harms to Black salon space users discussed here carry with them extra burdens not experienced by their White counterparts, but several unique burdens constitute executive harm in particular. The term "executive harm" reframes these burdens not just as inconveniences or inequalities, but as issues that can impair an individual's ability to execute their goals and plans, or directly tax their executive functions.

As clients, Black individuals often have to call around to salons to ask if they can do Black hair, then vet the stylist they've been booked with to make sure they can do what they say they can. One testimony found in an article by Natasha Marsh illustrates the necessity for Black individuals to engage in a rigorous vetting process, asking questions about stylists' experience working on textured or natural hair, and the availability of Black hairstylists. Marsh says "Unfortunately, as a Black woman, my experience has taught me to ask a combination of these questions when calling a new hair salon." March continues, "My experience was always the same: arriving at the salon eager and excited only to be greeted with stares and shock at why I failed to mention I had 'ethnic' hair" (Marsh 2020). Black clients may also have to travel long distances from their homes in order to find a stylist who can safely provide services, which is not the case for White salon customers. Getting something simple like a wash and blow dry service while traveling often cannot be accomplished because the providers in the resort, hotel, or other nearby salons aren't skilled in all hair textures. Having textured hair while traveling requires a lot of planning, tools, and products that most of us with straight textured hair don't have to think about.

Some clients experience being turned away from services completely, for simply having "Black" hair (TEN Petition; Jaclyn T.; Alysha S.; Reddit Anonymous). The experience of being met with "stares and shock," or turned away entirely upon arrival at salons, reveals the emotional toll and the need for emotional regulation, another facet of executive function taxed by these encounters. This necessity for extensive planning, preparation, and vetting before accessing a service that is straightforward for others highlights the disproportionate allocation of

resources required from Black individuals. As Marsh points out, this experience is not unique, “women with textured hair don't have the luxury of going to any salon. It's not common for us to have good experiences when we don't vet prospective salons. As a result, we stick to hair salons that cater to Black or curly hair” (Marsh 2020). Unfortunately, for many Black clients, finding a salon that caters to their needs isn’t that easy as there is a difficulty faced by Black individuals, particularly those with coily hair, in accessing suitable and safe hair care services and products.

19.6% of Black women report having to travel over an hour for hair styling services compared to just 3.9% of White women, and women with coily hair, a group predominantly comprised of Black women, are five times more likely to travel three or more hours for hair care than those with straight hair. According to the former president of an all-girls college in Massachusetts, when Black students consider the institution, the challenge of finding textured hair care services is one of the most frequently voiced concerns and one that ranks as high as finding a community church (Byrd and Tharps 139). Salon clients like this Twitter user describe driving long distances to avoid texture fees or being refused service, “I've had this problem at several salons. I call them white salons. They always quote me at 200 for the thickness and texture of my hair or refuse to do my hair. I'd have to drive 40 mins to an hour for a salon that would accept me but luckily I finally found a good salon” (BearMedusa). Testimonies like this not only exemplify the scarcity of suitable and accessible hair care options for those with coily textures but also the extraordinary lengths to which they must go to receive care that meets their needs.

Hair care products suitable for Black hair textures may not be readily available in mainstream stores or may be segregated within these stores, making it harder to find products that cater specifically to their hair care needs. 62.8% of women in the U.S. with straight hair say it is “easy” to find products that suit their hair, followed by 53.4% of women with wavy hair, whereas, 37.1% of women with coily hair say it is difficult to find products that suit them,

followed by 32.3% of women with curly hair. Consequently, Black women with coily hair often spend more and travel farther in their quest for suitable products (Ghansah 2023). These additional efforts and the stress they induce can deplete an individual's cognitive bandwidth, leaving less capacity for other tasks that require executive function, potentially impacting overall productivity, mental health, and well-being. Furthermore, although there has been progress in some stores and brands towards greater inclusivity and representation, many consumers still report experiences where products geared towards Black hair and skin care are separated from other beauty products, often placed in sections labeled as "ethnic" or "multicultural.” In a 2020 article for Byrdie Natasha Marsh, a Black woman, shares her personal experience of feeling like an outsider and a traitor when shopping in the main beauty aisle after being conditioned to shop in the smaller, segregated section for Black hair care products, “sectioning off Black hair care products into a couple shelves—with never enough products or variety—perpetuates a racial stereotype that Black hair doesn’t fit in.” She argues that separating products by ethnicity in the beauty aisle is a form of segregation that triggers hair trauma and makes people with natural hair feel inferior and less desirable and that it reinforces the societal expectation that European features are desirable and normal (Marsh 2020). Having to navigate through a store and spend additional mental energy, physical energy, and time to find a small, often less well-maintained section for their beauty needs can increase the cognitive load on Black shoppers. The limited selection of products available in these sections might force Black shoppers to make more complex decisions about which products to purchase to meet their specific hair or skin care needs. This can lead to decision fatigue, where making decisions becomes more difficult with each subsequent choice due to the depletion of mental energy. In some markets the products found in the ethnic section are locked behind glass, requiring further efforts to find an associate to unlock the case so Black shoppers can access what they need (Griffith). Locking up products marketed to Black consumers perpetuates a presumption that Black customers are more likely to steal, reinforcing harmful stereotypes and contributing to a shopping environment where

Black individuals feel surveilled and discriminated against. On her website, shopper Marissa McGee shares her experience of finding Black hair care products locked behind glass at a Walmart in California's Bay Area. This practice, she notes, is in stark contrast to other hair care products that are freely accessible on open shelves. She describes the feelings of hurt, humiliation and disheartening frustration that arise from being subjected to this discriminatory treatment. McGee highlights how this experience of "shopping while Black" involves being monitored and treated with suspicion, reinforcing negative stereotypes about Black people. Unable to shake the feelings, she questioned a Walmart associate about why these products were locked up, and received dismissive and racist responses, further exacerbating her sense of alienation and injustice (McGee). This practice not only inconveniences Black shoppers but also perpetuates systemic racism and microaggressions, contributing to the broader pattern of racial discrimination that Black individuals face daily. The mere act of shopping, which should be straightforward, becomes a reminder of societal inequities and can contribute to a reduced sense of belonging and inclusivity in the retail environment. The stress of anticipating or experiencing racial bias in retail settings can strain decision-making, and even lead to choices one otherwise wouldn’t make. One study found that when faced with racial microaggressions in retail settings, Black shoppers sometimes buy things in order to undermine the stereotype that Black customers are less than ideal, or that they only window shop and don’t have money to spend. Other study respondents left without buying anything, so as not to reward the employee for their bias, while others chose to avoid shopping altogether to remove the possibility of discrimination (Pittman). Overall, the segregated beauty aisle practice places an additional, unnecessary burden on Black consumers, taxing their executive functions in ways that extend beyond the average shopping experience.

Black hair can require specific maintenance routines to remain healthy, such as regular moisturizing, protective styling, and gentle handling to prevent breakage. Because of the difficulties faced in finding stylists capable of safely serving textured hair and Black clients, Black

individuals often take care of their own hair needs, without the help of a licensed stylist. However, because there is often a lack of research, education, or resources on proper textured hair care, home haircare practices often must rely on trial and error or community knowledge, which can be time-consuming, ineffective, and sometimes even harmful. Traditional haircare practices like greasing the scalp and using heavy oils on the hair can have negative effects on hair and scalp health, but routines like this and other practices passed down through generations are still prevalent today. Many textured hair care specialists spend a great deal of time and energy helping people with curly or coily hair unlearn these ineffective and harmful practices (Dowrich-Phillips). The persistence of these practices is likely due (at least in part) to the lack of research and development energy spent on safe textured hair products and techniques.

Despite being the dominant consumers in the hair care industry, products marketed to women of color are often less safe than those aimed at white women, prompting a turn to home hair remedies. A study by the Silent Spring Institute revealed that hair care products predominantly used by women of color contain harmful chemicals, including parabens, phthalates, and nonylphenol, which are linked to asthma, hormone disruptions, and cancer. Astonishingly, many of these toxic substances were not disclosed on the product labels. The research found that 50% of the products used by women of color contained these hazardous chemicals, compared to only 7% of products for white women (James-Todd 1). For a long time, the beauty industry has primarily focused on catering to white consumers, and with textured hair being marginalized or deemed less desirable, the perceived market demand for specialized products is diminished, leading to underinvestment in research and development for products catering to textured hair (Cullor). Concerns about product safety, the potential for hair damage, and the social implications of hair appearance can all weigh heavily on Black consumers. One ex-relaxer user worries about her product usage, even decades later, “I had relaxers for a long time, so it could still impact me. I’m 38 and I don’t have a child. So when I saw it, [the harmful

effects of hair relaxers on women's health] I was like ‘damn, could this be the reason?” (Karimi). While there has been some progress in recent years, with more brands emerging that focus on the needs of Black hair and a greater push for inclusivity in the beauty industry, there remains a significant need for increased research and development to address these historical gaps and ensure that Black consumers have more access to products that meet their hair care needs safely and effectively. Black shoppers still need to invest more time and effort into researching products suitable for their hair type. This extra burden of sifting through limited options and verifying product safety can increase cognitive load, making shopping a more taxing and less efficient process.

4.4 Identity Harms

As we have seen, Black bodies have historically been subjected to derogatory views and practices within white supremacist cultures. This historical context sets the stage for understanding current experiences in hair salons as part of a longer trajectory of identity harm, where Black hair and Black beauty practices have been marginalized, demonized, or deemed inferior.

Identity harms refer to the negative pressures that can make it difficult for individuals to achieve and sustain positive self-perceptions and expressions of identity. These harms arise from discrimination or prejudice against certain perceived aspects of their identity, such as race, gender, sexuality, or culture. As a result, identity harms can limit a person's full participation in society and are often perpetuated by systemic inequality, exclusion, and discrimination. These harms can stem from explicit actions, such as discriminatory laws or policies, or from more subtle forms of bias and exclusion, affecting everything from employment opportunities to social recognition and respect. Some testimonies exemplify identity harm in the form of aesthetic harm; they communicate a negative impact on the ability to enjoy, engage with, or value aesthetic experiences. These harms result from systemic inequalities, cultural biases, or the

imposition of the dominant cultural aesthetic. These particular aesthetic harms are forms of identity harm, in so far as they restrict expression and/or contribute to a degradation of one's identity.

The effects of these kinds of identity harms likely permeate various dimensions of life, including psychological, social, and economic aspects. The stress of facing near-constant discrimination or prejudice can erode self-esteem and undermine one’s sense of belonging, which potentially makes it challenging for that individual to engage confidently and safely in societal activities. The suppression of a deeply held sense of self, of the power that comes from self-knowledge, and the self-love that comes from access to that power and knowledge is a form of oppression (Lorde 55). The pressure to conform to Eurocentric beauty standards can undermine Black individuals' access to the power and information contained in their natural beauty and authentic selves. Those same pressures can also lead to a negative opinion of the self and others that is rooted in impossible aesthetic standards and a desire to conform to a specific image — one that is often unattainable (Lorde 167). Those who do not fit the "mythical norm" in America, usually white, thin, young, heterosexual, Christian, and financially secure, are often seen as lacking and are subjected to discrimination based on beauty standards (Lorde 116). These deeply ingrained societal standards and perceptions that negatively frame Black bodies and features, inherently viewing Blackness through a lens of fear, disdain, or aversion are what Taylor calls "negrophobic somatic aesthetics" (Taylor Ch 4, pp 4-6). Negrophobic somatic aesthetics critically examine how aesthetic judgments are influenced by and contribute to anti-Black racism, impacting perceptions of beauty, worth, and acceptability within society. These aesthetics manifest in various aspects of society, including the arts, media, fashion, and beauty industries, reinforcing and perpetuating racial hierarchies and discrimination by privileging Eurocentric features and characteristics (Taylor 15). This can lead to identity harm by devaluing the physical appearance of Black individuals and cultures, contributing to internalized racism, self-esteem issues, and the erasure or marginalization of Black aesthetics.

Identity harms can lead to social isolation, as individuals may withdraw from social interactions to avoid further harm. This withdrawal limits access to social support and diminishes opportunities for individuals to contribute to and participate in societal practices. Perhaps one of the most insidious effects of identity harm is the internalization of prejudice. Individuals may begin to believe negative stereotypes about their own identity groups, which can further damage their self-esteem and sense of self-worth, hindering their ability to see themselves as capable and valuable members of society. A 2020 study at California State University Long Beach examined the associations between racism, internalized shame, and self-esteem among Black Americans. The study found that experiences of racism were linked to increased feelings of shame among Black individuals. It also revealed that low self-esteem intensified this sense of shame. Essentially, facing racial discrimination not only affects how individuals see themselves but also contributes to deeper feelings of not being good enough, causing a significant impact on personal identity and self-worth (Johnson). The testimony of Kim Watson, who recounts a childhood experience of “wanting desperately to get rid of signs of her Blackness” after being mocked for her Afro puffs, underscores the pervasive nature of these stereotypes and the deep-seated desire to conform to Eurocentric beauty standards to mitigate identity harm (Byrd and Tharps 136).

Personal identity and self-definition are critically important for Black individuals and for Black women in particular, as they are a means of resistance and empowerment in the face of systemic oppression and controlling images. Black women have historically navigated a dual consciousness, adopting the language and manners of the oppressor for protection while maintaining a self-defined standpoint away from the dominant gaze. This process involves significant energy to maintain independent self-definitions, which serve as acts of resistance against the objectification and marginalization of Black womanhood (Collins 97-100). In salon spaces, Black individuals often confront controlling images and stereotypes about their hair being “unmanageable” that reflect broader societal devaluations of Blackness (Reddit

IBeatrixQuix). One testimony describes a White stylist equating natural textured Black hair to a poodle-like appearance, while simultaneously claiming that having an afro is as undesirable as looking like a dog (Reddit ChocolateChippo). Adding to this narrative, this account from Reddit of a Black woman visiting a predominantly White salon illustrates the dehumanization and othering that can occur within these spaces:

> “I went to a White hair salon after hearing high praise from a friend repeatedly. It felt odd as soon as I walked in. My hairdresser wasn't expecting my hair to be as coarse or as thick as it was and had expected to wash and straighten it within an hour. So when she obviously couldn't finish it in that time, she had another hairstylist work on it while she took on her 3 o'clock client, then when that stylist got her client, they switched me to another stylist. I felt like I was traded around like I was some task no one could take on. Granted it was just some bad communication my friend had made with the stylist, but it didn't stop me from feeling like I was being passed around like an animal in a big salon while everyone watches” (Reddit StrawberryYogurt0).

Her experience of being passed from stylist to stylist, reduced to a challenge rather than recognized as a client with unique needs further exemplifies the clash between self-definitions and the salon professionals' expectations rooted in Eurocentric standards. This instance not only undermines the Black client's autonomy over her body but also deepens the erosion of her sense of self-worth.

Discrimination in hair and makeup departments on TV and film sets is another area of salon space segregation that leads to identity harm. Many Black actors have shared personal experiences that highlight the lack of knowledge and expertise among hair and makeup professionals when it comes to working with textured hair and darker skin tones. This gap in expertise not only compromises the physical appearance of these actors on screen, potentially affecting their careers, but also sends the message that Black hair, skin, and beauty, in general, is an afterthought, if it is thought of at all. Jaz Sinclair, from the TV show *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*, which ran from 2018 to 2020, had to push the production for appropriate hair care after the first season: “I’m waking up early and doing my hair before I come to set, and it’s not fair that my white costars get to roll out of bed and feel taken care of and that I don’t have that same luxury” (Fowler). But, once they found someone who was amazing with her hair, she got to “roll

out of bed and come to set and feel beautiful", which she says, "makes a huge, huge difference" (Fowler). The situation on set was not unique: "Every time I go on a new job, and every time I sit in a new hair chair, I'm holding my freaking breath because you do not know what you're going to get. Sometimes you get people who are equipped, and sometimes you get people who are not equipped, and it's freaking stressful" (Fowler). A thread posted on (then) Twitter by Yvette Nicole Brown, and the ensuing replies, confirms this trend: "Most black actresses come to a new set w/ their hair done (me) or bring their wigs & clip-ins w/them. It's either that or take a chance that you will look crazy on-screen" (Brown). Aisha Dee of "The Bold Type" revealed on her Instagram account that it took three seasons before finding someone skilled in handling textured hair (Dee). Monique Coleman's experience on "High School Musical" further illustrates the issue, as she disclosed that the use of headbands for her character, Taylor McKessie, was not a fashion choice but a necessity to cover up inadequate hairstyling; "the truth is, is that they had done my hair and they had done it very poorly in the front. And we had to start filming before I had a chance to fix it" This situation led to the innovative solution of incorporating headbands into her character's wardrobe, which then became a signature part of Taylor's style throughout the series (Singh). The lack of diversity in hair and makeup departments not only undermines the actors' ability to fully embody their roles, but also, by prioritizing White beauty standards it can contribute to feelings of isolation and otherness for non-white individuals.

In cosmetology schools, the curriculum choices, textbook content, the styles and techniques taught, or even the marketing materials can all contribute to a homogenized view of beauty that marginalizes diverse identities and expressions, further embedding the systemic roots of identity harm experienced by Black individuals. For Black students and clients, this environment can foster feelings of isolation and devaluation, directly impacting their sense of belonging and self-worth. The relegation of Black hair to a specialized or marginal area of study, rather than as an integral part of the cosmetology curriculum, sends a clear message about whose beauty is valued and whose is not. This not only undermines the professional

development of non-Black students, who may leave their education ill-prepared to serve a diverse clientele but can also place an undue burden on Black students, who are expected to navigate these systemic biases while learning their craft. One cosmetology student recalls the naming of mannequins in her cosmetology school: “All the mannequins had names. The ones that I can remember were Jessica, Beverly, and Mia. The one male mannequin was named Jake. The only Black mannequin there, they labeled her Overly Curly. It was the only one there that didn’t have a name” (Italie). Every mannequin being assigned a name except for the only Black mannequin, derogatorily labeled "Overly Curly," exemplifies the othering and marginalization of Black identities within even cosmetology educational spaces. This practice reduces the Black mannequin to a caricature of its hair texture, implicitly conveying to students that Black hair is an undesirable anomaly rather than a valued and standard part of the curriculum. Such practices in cosmetology schools exemplify identity harm by perpetuating stereotypes and entrenching Eurocentric beauty standards as the norm.

4.4.1 Aesthetic Harms

Aesthetic harms, particularly those that impact an individual's self-expression or body image, are a form of identity harm. In the examples I’ll discuss, the particular aesthetic experiences are those related to hair, hairstyles, and beauty standards. Aesthetic elements, such as one's personal style, make-up, or hair, are key ways individuals express their identity and personality. When someone is harmed aesthetically, whether through societal standards, discrimination, or physical alterations without consent, it can restrict their ability to express themselves. This limitation can lead to a loss of identity or a sense of being misunderstood or misrepresented by others. One person recounted an all-too-common experience with White stylists, highlighting the disregard for curly hair: “Their go-to after cutting my hair would be to blow dry and straighten it. A request to leave it curly would result in them overloading my hair with gel. I never really left with what I wanted because I think their goal was to shrink and flatten

my hair as much as possible when that's the opposite of what I've wanted ever since I began to embrace my curls” (Reddit ChocolateChippo).

Societal norms can marginalize certain beauty standards, leading to harm affecting individuals' ability to enjoy or participate meaningfully in hair and beauty-related aesthetic experiences. Lack of accessibility to aesthetic tools or products that allow for self-expression (e.g., clothing, cosmetics, and hair care products suitable for all skin tones and hair types) can prevent one from participating in aesthetic expression involving these tools. Lack of access to skilled and safe practitioners limits one's ability to meaningfully express their identity through hairstyling and care. The textured hair education gap can cause individuals with natural or textured hair to struggle to find salons that can cater to their needs, reinforcing the notion that their hair is undesirable or unprofessional. Another testimony sheds light on the challenges faced due to this gap: “Absolutely terrible; often ending in tears. I’m mixed with 3c hair and I grew up in an area without very many Black salons. Over the years I tried quite a few but never any luck :/ It was just so frustrating because every time I’d have someone White do my hair they’d absolutely insist they can do my hair and it’d either end in them ruining my hair or stopping halfway through” (Reddit workaccchi).

The emphasis on certain beauty standards in salon spaces can lead individuals to internalize negative perceptions about their natural appearance and be excluded from the aesthetic narrative, which reinforces feelings of otherness and can damage an individual's identity by signaling that their appearance is not valued or considered. This experience of exclusion and aesthetic harm is exemplified in a testimony that describes feeling ostracized by salon spaces. The testimony recounted how the response "Oh no, we don't do that," in response to requests for textured hair care, made her feel "horrible and ugly as a young black girl who needed help getting her hair done." Her repeated rejections, after calling over a dozen salons only to find none that would accommodate her hair type, not only highlighted a lack of knowledge and acceptance but also placed her in what felt like an "unimportant category,"

exacerbating the damage to her identity and self-perception (Jacklyn T. TEN Petition). Black hairstyling practices and the spaces where they routinely and safely occur can act as sites of cultural and artistic expression, challenging Eurocentric beauty standards and affirming Black identities, and the role of art and aesthetic expression in challenging dominant cultural meanings and supporting Black liberation is crucial. However, spaces that prioritize European standards of beauty and marginalize the features and care practices of textured hair undermine Black individuals' ability to practice aesthetic expression safely through hair care and styling as well as participate in the communal aspects of identity-building and empowerment.

Aesthetic Exclusion

Aesthetic exclusion is where individuals are prevented from participating in beauty-related experiences that are crucial for self-expression and identity affirmation. Such actions contribute to the internalization of negative perceptions about one's natural appearance, fostering a sense of otherness and inadequacy. Moreover, the exclusion perpetuates the marginalization of Black beauty standards, thereby hindering the opportunity for Black individuals to safely and confidently express their aesthetic identity in spaces that should be accessible and inclusive. An example of aesthetic exclusion was shared by an anonymous salon receptionist working at a predominately White salon: “Every client with Black hair in their profile had the word NO beside their name in big, bold, all-caps letters. I coyly made eye contact with the person training me. ‘No one here knows how to do African-American hair,’ they instinctively replied …This is entirely unacceptable. Some salon owners and stylists assume the stereotype that Black hair is unmanageable, while others just blatantly refuse service” (Anonymous). This scenario exemplifies aesthetic harm by illustrating a direct and systemic denial of service and acknowledgment based on hair type, which is intrinsically linked to racial identity. This act not only discriminates against individuals based on their natural hair texture but also communicates a broader societal message that Black hair, and by extension, Black identity, is less valued, undesirable, or unmanageable within the context of prevailing beauty norms. By

denying service based on hair type, the salon not only enforces Eurocentric beauty standards but also restricts the communal and cultural aspects of hairstyling for Black individuals, impacting their ability to engage in practices that are integral to identity-building and empowerment.

4.5 Systemic Harms

The testimonies gathered in this chapter shed light on the pervasive and multifaceted harms experienced by *individuals* due to racial bias and segregation within salon spaces. But a bigger picture type of harm is highlighted by the patterns that emerge in these testimonies: These testimonies not only articulate experiences that stem from racist ideologies and systems but some also illustrate how such practices can *perpetuate* racism and *enforce* a system of segregation and discrimination. Some testimonies directly call attention to this fact: One signer of a petition calling for closing the textured hair education gap wrote “This ignorant and blatant segregation of hair types is all too common in salons around the world, even as institutions have worked toward equality. This modern-day segregation can’t be normalized or swept under the rug. We must continue to fight the invisible, Jim Crow-inspired signs we see, if not just to combat the generational trauma they inspire.” (Anonymous, TEN Petition). Segregated salon spaces can perpetuate generational trauma, echoing the segregationist policies of the past. Another individual emphasized the absurdity of having to petition for the right to beauty services, “This shouldn't have to be petitioned, yet it's another on the list of small, "thousand cuts" indignities that impact Black + brown folks seeking services. Everyone deserves to look beautiful and get their textured hair treated well by stylists educated on all kinds of needs and techniques” (Nikk C. TEN Petition). The call to overhaul narrow standards of competency in the beauty industry is not just a demand for inclusivity but a plea for recognition and validation of diverse beauty standards.

The minimal exposure to textured hair in cosmetology programs reinforces racial disparities within the industry, segregating not only the clientele but also the services provided (Italie). In terms of the courses and curriculum, there is a dramatic lack of exposure to textured hair. “In beauty schools, you don’t learn how to do texture,” says celebrity hairstylist Tippi Shorter. “You really only learn how to do the bare minimum, understanding color theory and how to do basic haircuts and a basic blow-dry, to pass a board exam to get your license. I went to school for 1,600 hours, and we probably spent about five of those hours working on hair that wasn’t naturally straight. So as a stylist, you come out with very basic knowledge, and it’s not a culture that speaks to texture because their whole philosophy is about making hair straight” (Valenti). This philosophy extends to the business model of many salons, where the focus is on straightening textured hair as a default approach to beauty. This "blowout-or-bust mentality" not only discriminates against clients with textured hair but also places undue pressure on stylists of color, who are often expected to shoulder the responsibility of catering to these clients due to the industry-wide lack of training and appreciation for textured hair.

Moreover, sidelining Black hairstylists in salon spaces and the entertainment industry when it comes to hiring perpetuates a cycle of segregation and inequality. This deficiency not only marginalizes talent but also sends the message that Black beauty isn’t worth perfecting or highlighting. When actors of color find themselves without the necessary support on set, it not only affects their performance and confidence but also impacts how they are perceived by audiences. This situation perpetuates a cycle where stereotypical representations become the norm, limiting the types of roles and narratives that are developed for actors of color.

These testimonies collectively underscore the urgent need for systemic change within the beauty industry, from education and training to salon practices and professional opportunities. Addressing these issues is not merely about improving service quality or expanding business models; it's a critical step toward dismantling the remnants of segregation and racism that persist in contemporary society.

5. Implications and Solutions

In previous chapters, I explored the systemic racism underpinning the segregation of salon spaces and cosmetology education, and the consequent harms Black individuals face. This segregation fosters environments where Black people often receive inadequate and disrespectful hair care, perpetuating stereotypes that deem Black hair to be inferior and limiting access to specialized services. The result is physical harm from improper care, psychological distress from feeling devalued, and economic disadvantages for stylists due to a lack of diverse training. This cycle of harm, rooted in discriminatory practices, underscores segregation not just as a physical separation but as a manifestation, or a symptom of deeper systemic issues.

This chapter challenges the assumption that simply integrating segregated salon spaces is the key to resolving the issues faced by Black individuals in the beauty industry. While it might seem logical to counter segregation with integration, this perspective overlooks two critical points: first, segregation itself isn't the core issue but rather a symptom of deeper, systemic racism and discriminatory practices targeting Black communities. Second, the argument for integration simplifies the complexities surrounding the self-segregation of Black individuals, ignoring the cultural and social significance of such spaces. Critically examining Elizabeth Anderson's views on integration, this chapter argues that the real solution lies in directly addressing systemic racism and its manifestations within the beauty industry.

5.1 Examining the Case For Integration

The relationship between the segregation of salon spaces and the harms experienced by Black individuals is undeniable. This segregation not only reinforces harmful stereotypes and perpetuates racial discrimination but also denies Black individuals access to services that respect and cater to their unique needs. Given the long history of enforced racial segregation and its role in perpetuating racial inequality and injustice, integration might be seen as a direct and obvious way to correct these historical wrongs. At first glance, integrating previously

segregated spaces seems like a reasonable way to begin to dismantle the structures that have perpetuated racial disparities. After all, as Elizabeth Anderson writes in “The Imperative of Integration,” “If racial segregation is the problem, it stands to reason that racial integration is the remedy. Since the problem is an injustice, the remedy is an imperative of justice” (Anderson 112). Anderson asserts that racial segregation is fundamentally unjust, as it perpetuates inequalities and denies individuals the social, economic, and political benefits of living in a racially integrated society. For Anderson, integration is not merely a desirable outcome but a moral imperative necessary for the realization of justice. Anderson believes that true integration goes beyond mere physical co-presence of different racial groups in the same spaces. Instead, it requires substantive interactions that foster mutual respect, understanding, and shared civic life among racially diverse groups (Anderson 116). Central to Anderson's argument is the idea that integration addresses both the material and psychological harms of segregation. Materially, segregation restricts access to resources, opportunities, and networks that are crucial for social mobility and economic stability. Psychologically, it reinforces harmful stereotypes, fosters prejudice, and cultivates environments where racial biases can flourish unchecked. Integration, by contrast, promotes exposure to diversity, which can challenge and eventually reduce racial prejudices and stereotypes (113). Anderson calls for active measures from policymakers to promote integration across various spheres of society, including housing, education, and the workplace. For Anderson, such measures are essential to break down the systemic barriers that maintain racial segregation and to move society towards a more equitable and just state (134).

Pursuing integration in salon spaces, in the manner Anderson advocates, would involve more than simply ensuring a mix of racial backgrounds among clients and staff. It would require a concerted effort to foster environments where diverse hair types and beauty standards are respected, understood, and celebrated. Anderson would likely argue that integration in salon spaces would help mitigate the harms experienced by Black individuals by breaking down barriers that perpetuate racial discrimination and unequal access to quality services (115-117).

There are two problems with the imperative of integration in so far as it is applied to salon spaces. One is that Anderson's position, while aiming for a goal of integration that transcends mere physical co-presence, does not attend to the cultural, social, and identity importance of spaces like Black salons and barbershops nor does it fully account for the complexities of transforming societal attitudes and prejudices ingrained through systemic racism. The other is that in the case of salon spaces, segregation itself is not the root problem, but rather the racist policies and practices that enforce it.

5.1.2 Problems with Anderson's Model

While Elizabeth Anderson's model of integration focuses on dismantling systemic barriers to racial equality, it may not fully account for the deeply ingrained nature of racial biases and the complexity of transforming individual opinions on race. Anderson emphasizes structural changes and policies to promote racial integration as pathways to equality, claiming that such measures can mitigate racial prejudices and foster mutual respect among diverse racial groups. Anderson acknowledges the need for "substantive interactions that foster mutual respect, understanding, and shared civic life" (Anderson 116), which suggests a recognition of some emotional and psychological dimensions of racial integration. However, while Anderson's approach gestures toward the importance of mutual respect and understanding, it remains insufficient and potentially simplistic. The deeply entrenched nature of racial attitudes, shaped by long-standing societal narratives and personal experiences, requires more than policy changes or fostering interactions; it demands a profound shift in social consciousness and a reevaluation of identity that extends beyond the scope of Anderson's structural approach.

As Charles W. Mills argues in "The Racial Contract," racial inequalities are not merely the result of individual prejudices or systemic barriers that can be dismantled through integration alone, but are deeply embedded in the very foundations of society through a 'racial contract.'

This contract is both a literal and metaphorical agreement that shapes social, political, and economic relations by privileging certain races over others. It is an unwritten yet pervasive societal agreement that systematically benefits white people while oppressing non-white people (Mills 12-14, 19-20). The racial contract has its roots in the colonial practices of the past, where European powers established racial hierarchies to justify their domination and exploitation of non-European peoples. These hierarchies were then embedded into the fabric of modern societies, influencing laws, economics, institutions, and cultural norms (Mills 30-31). The racial contract promotes a form of ignorance among privileged racial groups about the realities and histories of racial oppression. This ignorance is not accidental but structurally produced and maintained (Mills 31,38). In the United States, for example, slavery was legally sanctioned through various laws and the Constitution, and later, Jim Crow laws enforced racial segregation and purposely disenfranchised Black Americans. Racial discrimination in hiring practices, workplace policies, and segregation in public schools further exemplify the literal enforcement of the racial contract. The racial contract is metaphorical in the sense that it encompasses the pervasive cultural narratives and stereotypes that shape societal attitudes toward race. These implicit biases are not codified in law but are deeply ingrained in societal norms and behaviors.

Thus, while Anderson’s model includes a call for fostering respect and understanding, it does not fully grapple with the pervasive, underlying racial biases that the 'racial contract' maintains. While Anderson emphasizes structural changes, the racial contract underscores the deep-rooted nature of racial biases that are reinforced by structural racism. These biases are not easily dismantled by policy changes alone and require a more profound transformation of societal consciousness. Mills underscores the necessity of a more radical altering of societal structures and individual consciousness. On this model, achieving racial justice requires not only the integration and policy reforms Anderson proposes but also a profound reevaluation of the racial assumptions and privileges embedded in the societal contract itself. Furthermore,

Anderson's model may not adequately consider the emotional and psychological dimensions of racial prejudice. Changing opinions on race is not purely a cognitive process but involves addressing fears, insecurities, and deeply ingrained ideas about beauty, professionalism, desirability, etc. The model's emphasis on structural integration seems to overlook that without addressing these deeper psychological aspects, the intended effects of integration policies on transforming racial attitudes may be limited, as structural changes alone do not guarantee a shift in personal beliefs and attitudes. Anderson's solution of building "mutual respect" through integration also neglects the asymmetrical risks and costs involved. The process of building relationships and fostering mutual respect can be significantly more burdensome for Black individuals than for White individuals. Black people often bear higher risks and costs in these interactions, as they navigate environments where they are more likely to encounter prejudice, microaggressions, and discrimination. This disparity in the emotional and psychological labor required can hinder the effectiveness of integration policies. The model's emphasis on structural integration seems to overlook that without addressing these deep and sometimes hidden psychological aspects, the intended effects of integration policies on transforming racial attitudes may be limited, as structural changes alone do not guarantee a shift in personal beliefs and attitudes, and shifts in some (or even all) beliefs and attitudes do not guarantee shifts in others. Anderson's model presupposes a level of racial enlightenment and anti-racist commitment among White participants that is likely overly optimistic given the current societal climate. It overlooks the substantial, ongoing effort required on the part of White people (many of whom stand to benefit from maintaining the status quo) to educate and alter deeply held beliefs and behaviors.

Furthermore, integration as a blanket solution neglects the importance of cultural, social, and identity aspects that minority communities value in their segregated spaces. For example, Black salons and barbershops not only provide hair care services but also serve as cultural

hubs and safe spaces for expression and mutual support. Forced integration without regard for these functions undermines the role such spaces play in cultural preservation and community building. Though the informal systemic segregation of salon spaces has a history tied to systemic, institutionalized racism, according to Tommie Shelby, Black people sometimes choose to self-segregate, and with good reason (Shelby 270, 272). Shelby argues that while Anderson compellingly demonstrates the injustices of segregation and the potential benefits of integration, the practicalities of achieving integration in a deeply divided society are not sufficiently addressed. According to Shelby, Anderson's critique may not fully appreciate the value that voluntary, self-segregated communities can offer to minority groups. He points out that such communities can serve as sources of cultural preservation, solidarity, and mutual support in the face of a society that still harbors racism and discrimination. In addressing the demands of justice, it matters what reasons Black people have for engaging in self-segregation, and that sometimes they self-segregate to "protect their shared interests in a society where they are deeply disadvantaged and vulnerable to mistreatment and political marginalization" (Shelby 270). If Shelby is right, and I think they are, then what justice demands is to rectify the harm, not the segregation. Even if only a small percentage of salon space segregation is due to choices made by Black individuals in order to protect themselves, or foster safe spaces for community building and resistance, then justice isn't done by simply seeking to integrate salon spaces.

5.1.3 Segregation is a Symptom

This last point is related to the second line of argument against Anderson, which is that segregation of salon spaces is a symptom, not the root problem. What needs rectification is the harm and injustice that are *created and perpetuated* by this segregation. To illuminate this point, imagine a scenario where Irish people exclusively visit Irish stylists, and Italian people do the same with Italian stylists. This form of segregation doesn't prompt us to claim there is an unjust arrangement, and the reason is that neither group suffers differential harm or unfairness due to

this segregation. This segregation is a matter of cultural or personal preference, not a manifestation of systemic inequality. In this scenario there's no power dynamic skewing access to or quality of service based on ethnicity; both communities have their needs equitably met without discrimination or harm. Such segregation is a personal or cultural choice, untainted by the historical and systemic injustices that underpin racial segregation in similar spaces.

In contrast, when we consider racial segregation in salon spaces, particularly affecting Black clients, the issue isn't merely that there is segregation, but that this segregation is a symptom and a reinforcement of deeper systemic racism. The root of the injustice here is not the act of separating individuals based on race, but the historical and ongoing systemic racism that creates unequal conditions and experiences for different racial groups. Racial segregation in salons often reflects and reinforces racial stereotypes, biases, and inequalities. It's not simply that Black clients are separated from White clients, but that this separation is part of a larger system of racial disparities—where access to services, quality of care, and even the respect and dignity afforded to clients can be vastly different based on race. This system is supported by historical legacies of racism and current practices that maintain inequality, such as unequal educational opportunities for stylists, racial biases in hiring practices, and marketing strategies that exclude or devalue Black beauty standards. Therefore, the injustice isn't the segregation itself but the systemic racism that segregation in salon spaces symbolizes and perpetuates. The solution, then, isn't merely to desegregate salons in a superficial sense—simply mixing clients and stylists of different races without addressing underlying issues. Segregation, in itself, is not inherently unjust; it's the context and consequences of segregation that determine its justice or injustice. In the case of segregation in salon spaces, it's the systemic racism underlying and exacerbated by segregation that needs to be addressed to achieve true justice and equality.

5.1.4 Some Preliminary Solutions

In virtue of discussing the connection between segregated salons and these particular harms, some preliminary solutions seem to come to light. In what follows, I will discuss some potential ways to mitigate harm to Black individuals in salon spaces and prevent the perpetuation of segregation that causes those harms.

The focus should be on dismantling systemic barriers to equality and ensuring justice for historically marginalized groups. This approach entails addressing economic disparities, educational inequities, and other forms of structural discrimination that persist regardless of the degree of racial integration within physical spaces. Communities formed through voluntary segregation can play a positive role in cultural preservation, fostering a sense of identity, and providing mutual support. Shelby suggests that such communities can exist within a just society, provided that their formation is genuinely voluntary and not a result of systemic coercion or exclusion (Shelby 283). Promoting diversity in salon spaces and cosmetology schools is crucial for addressing the deep-seated issues of systemic racism and discriminatory practices within the beauty industry. The historical segregation of these spaces not only enforces harmful racial stereotypes but also creates a stark divide between salons and schools serving different racial groups. This divide, far from being a simple matter of personal preference, is a direct result of historical policies and practices aimed at marginalizing Black individuals and limiting their access to comprehensive beauty services and education. While much of the work in integration primarily focuses on housing integration, the theories, and their critiques can apply to the narrower focus of salon space segregation as well. Integration of salons and schools should not be the goal of the industry. Instead, the industry as a whole, and the individuals who work within it, are obligated to create salon spaces that are actively inclusive and anti-racist so that we can avoid causing and perpetuating harm. A more integrated industry could be an outcome of such anti-racism work, but the goal should be to remove barriers that Black individuals face in being

able to receive the same services and education, with the same level of respect and consideration, as their White counterparts.

By incorporating training on a wide range of hair types, particularly textured hair, into the curriculum, cosmetology schools can better prepare students to meet the needs of a diverse clientele. This not only enhances the professional opportunities for cosmetologists but also ensures competent care for Black individuals, reducing the risk of harm to both hair and psyche. Making salon spaces more inclusive helps ensure that Black individuals feel welcomed and valued. Seeing oneself represented among the staff and clientele of a salon can foster a sense of belonging and community, countering feelings of marginalization. By exposing both clients and cosmetologists to a variety of hair textures and styles, diverse salon environments can challenge and dispel the harmful stereotypes that label Black hair as 'difficult' or 'unmanageable.' This exposure promotes a broader understanding and appreciation of textured hair's natural beauty and versatility.

I do not suggest that we create homogenized salon spaces with no culture or diversity among them, and I obviously don’t advocate for the abolition of Black salon spaces or beauty culture, or think that integrated salon spaces are necessarily a desired outcome, regardless of how they come about. There are many reasons that Black clients may choose a predominantly Black salon, or any salon, and what justice demands is that they are able to make those choices using the same criteria as their White counterparts and that they receive the same levels of care, respect, and safety. White stylists, salons, and schools have a duty to do anti-racism work, learn to work with and serve clients with all textures of hair so that fear of harm is not one of the criteria for selecting where to spend one's money and time.

The establishment of industry-wide standards and certifications that recognize proficiency in catering to a diverse range of hair types would represent a significant stride toward elevating the quality of care across the board. Currently, States vary widely in their educational requirements and licensing exams for cosmetologists, leading to significant

disparities in the quality of services provided across the country. By establishing a uniform standard, particularly in areas of cultural competency and handling diverse hair types, the industry ensures that all professionals, regardless of where they are trained or practice, possess the necessary skills to serve a diverse clientele effectively. A national standard for cosmetology exams sends a strong message about the industry's commitment to inclusivity and equitable treatment of all clients. It ensures that cultural competency and the ability to work with all hair types are recognized as essential skills for all beauty professionals, thereby promoting a nationwide culture of respect and understanding. Promoting textured hair education and advancing diversity and inclusion in salons and cosmetology schools are pivotal steps toward mitigating the economic disadvantages that Black individuals often face due to salon segregation. Currently, the lack of widespread, specialized training in textured hair care results in a scarcity of salons equipped to meet the needs of Black clients, forcing them to seek out specific, sometimes more expensive, service providers or to invest in costly products for at-home care. By integrating textured hair education into the standard curriculum of cosmetology schools, the industry can cultivate a new generation of stylists who are proficient in a broader range of hair types. This not only expands the options available to Black clients but also democratizes access to affordable hair care services, potentially reducing the financial burden associated with maintaining natural hair. Furthermore, fostering diversity and inclusion within the beauty industry does more than just enhance service provision; it actively contributes to the economic empowerment of Black individuals. When salons and beauty schools embrace these principles, they create opportunities for Black entrepreneurs and professionals to thrive, leading to the growth of Black-owned businesses and the creation of jobs within these communities. This, in turn, stimulates local economies and helps to break the cycle of economic disparity exacerbated by salon segregation. Additionally, as the market becomes more inclusive, the demand for products and services tailored to textured hair increases, encouraging further innovation and competition in this sector, as well as the development of safer and more effective

products and tools. Ultimately, by prioritizing education in textured hair care and committing to diversity and inclusion, the beauty industry can play a significant role in addressing the systemic economic inequalities that salon segregation perpetuates, paving the way for a more equitable and prosperous future for Black individuals.

To build upon these foundational steps of diversifying cosmetology education and promoting inclusivity within salons, we could consider additional smaller-step strategies that further bridge the gap between intention and action. These strategies not only aim to enhance the professional opportunities for cosmetologists but also ensure the well-being and satisfaction of Black individuals seeking salon services. Things like the implementation of paid mentorship programs could serve as a conduit for the transfer of invaluable knowledge and skills, particularly in the realm of textured hair care. Moreover, engaging with the broader community through workshops, seminars, and events that educate the public about the diversity of hair types could play a pivotal role in reshaping societal perceptions of beauty, emphasizing the importance of embracing textured hair and styling. Financial and developmental support for Black-owned salons and beauty schools, collaboration with product manufacturers for safer and more inclusive hair care solutions, and establishing feedback mechanisms for clients are all small ways to build a purposeful inclusionary industry.

Creating salon spaces that are inclusive and actively anti-racist can help foster the racial integration of the industry by fostering and maintaining inclusive and welcoming atmospheres. This involves training salon staff to be willing to really see Black clients' differences, difficulties, and needs as unique and not to pretend there isn’t work to be done on the part of White stylists, salons, and schools to create equity in salon spaces. Equity in salon spaces will also require stylists and educators to be culturally sensitive, address racial biases, diversify staff/hiring practices, promote diversity in advertisements and imagery, and ensure that all clients are treated with equal care, respect, and attention.

5.2 Conclusion

The issue of salon segregation, deeply entwined with systemic racism and historical discriminatory practices, is not an isolated phenomenon but is indicative of broader patterns of systemic inequality that have historical roots and contemporary manifestations. By acknowledging Black hair not merely as a physical attribute but as a profound aspect of cultural identity and personal expression, this work has sought to illuminate the broader implications of salon segregation. Chapter 2 directly confronts the argument that salon segregation might be seen as a natural outcome of human preferences or tendencies. Through a detailed examination of the history of haircare in America, it has been demonstrated that this segregation is far from a natural occurrence. Instead, it is a product of entrenched social processes, underscored by deliberate structural racism and discriminatory policies. This critical analysis has shown that the segregation observed in salon spaces is a constructed reality, shaped by historical and contemporary acts of exclusion and bias.

The testimonials presented in Chapter 4 have given voice to the lived experiences of Black individuals who navigate the realities of segregated salon spaces. These personal narratives underscore the tangible harms and injustices that result from such segregation, ranging from direct service denial to the subtler, yet equally damaging, perpetuation of stereotypes and exclusion. By centering these testimonies, this dissertation affirms the importance of acknowledging and validating these experiences to combat contributory injustice and the epistemic violence that often silences marginalized voices.

In Chapter 5, by proposing a series of preliminary solutions—ranging from educational reforms to industry-wide standards and policies aimed at promoting diversity and inclusion—this work not only outlines feasible steps toward mitigating the harms of segregation but also critically examines the challenges and pitfalls that may arise in the implementation of these solutions. Thus, I believe I have shown the complexity of salon segregation as a manifestation

of systemic racism, validated the experiences of those who suffer its consequences, and gestured toward a more inclusive and equitable cosmetology industry. Through this comprehensive exploration, it becomes evident that the issue of salon segregation—and the search for its resolution—touches on fundamental questions of dignity, identity, respect, and the right to belong, issues that resonate far beyond the salon chair.

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Abstract

ADDRESSING SALON SEGREGATION: STRUCTURAL RACISM IN THE SALON INDUSTRY

by

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Advisor: Dr. Josh Wilburn

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Degree: Doctor of Philosophy

In the United States, hair salons remain unofficially segregated by race, reflecting broader patterns of systemic inequality with deep historical roots and contemporary manifestations. This dissertation examines Black hair not merely as a physical attribute but as a profound aspect of cultural identity and personal expression. It aims to illuminate the broader implications of salon segregation, challenging the notion that it is a natural outcome of human preferences or tendencies. Instead, it argues that this segregation is the result of entrenched social processes, deliberate structural racism, and discriminatory policies that cause significant harm to Black individuals. By presenting testimonials from Black individuals, this work gives voice to the lived experiences of those navigating segregated salon spaces. It underscores the importance of acknowledging and validating these experiences to combat contributory injustice and the epistemic violence that often silences marginalized voices. This dissertation also explores the historical evolution of Black hair care, from its African origins and treatment during slavery to its modern-day significance, demonstrating how historical biases continue to influence contemporary practices. Through a philosophical lens, the study examines the intersection of hairstyling and structural racism, argues that salon segregation results in material, social, and epistemic harms, and advocates for practical and philosophical solutions. The resolution of

salon segregation touches on fundamental questions of dignity, identity, respect, and the right to belong—issues that resonate far beyond the salon chair.

Autobiographical Statement

I am a hairstylist with over 25 years of experience in the beauty industry. My journey has taken me from hands-on practice to an academic exploration of the intersection between hairstyling and philosophy. My current work focuses on addressing discrimination and disparity within the beauty industry through a philosophical lens, particularly examining structural racism and gender bias. By understanding these deep-seated issues, I aim to contribute to meaningful change and promote a more equitable and inclusive industry. In this dissertation, I explore the segregated nature of salons and its impact on Black individuals, driven by a commitment to uncovering the underlying causes of discrimination and proposing thoughtful solutions. This work combines my practical experience in the beauty sector with philosophical inquiry to offer new insights and pathways for addressing these critical challenges.