

Spring 5-22-2015

Got Hair that Flows in the Wind: The Complexity of Hair and Identity among African American Female Adolescents in Foster Care

Lakindra Michelle Mitchell Dove
Portland State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/open_access_etds



Part of the [Race and Ethnicity Commons](#), and the [Social Work Commons](#)

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

Mitchell Dove, Lakindra Michelle, "Got Hair that Flows in the Wind: The Complexity of Hair and Identity among African American Female Adolescents in Foster Care" (2015). *Dissertations and Theses*. Paper 2321.

<https://doi.org/10.15760/etd.2318>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations and Theses by an authorized administrator of PDXScholar. For more information, please contact pdxscholar@pdx.edu.

Got Hair that Flows in the Wind: The Complexity of Hair and Identity among African
American Female Adolescents in Foster Care

by

Lakindra Michelle Mitchell Dove

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in
Social Work and Social Research

Dissertation Committee:
Laurie E. Powers, Chair
Thomas Keller
Joy DeGruy
Veronica Dujon

Portland State University
2015

Abstract

African American children are disproportionately overrepresented in the child welfare system. Many of these children linger in the system and experience disconnection from their biological families, communities, cultural beliefs, values, and practices. Familial socialization and cultural exposure are essential to developing a positive ethnic identity and self-concept. For African American female adolescents, hair and hair care are critical areas for such socialization and support. This qualitative study explored the hair and hair care perceptions and experiences of African American female adolescents in foster care. The goal was to examine hair and hair's connection to, and influence on, sense of self and self-esteem for African American female adolescents in foster care.

Eleven African American female adolescents participated in individual interviews, and grounded theory was used to analyze the data. Four major themes emerged: hair care, perception of hair and identity as an African American female, societal influences on self-awareness, and influence of the foster care system. Results from the study indicated African American female adolescents in foster care identify hair as important. Participants noted hair is connected to appearance and shapes who they are and how they view themselves as African American females. Participants addressed the complexity of hair and politics associated with hair. The findings further emphasized the role of racial socialization and the importance of a supportive hair care environment. Participants also discussed their awareness of societal influences on their perception of African American women. They offered recommendations for improving the hair care

experiences of African American children in foster care, for supporting positive development of identity and self-esteem, and for implementing standards of practice that will ensure these youths' cultural needs are addressed in the child welfare system.

Dedication

To my loving great grandparents and grandparents, who planted multiple seeds in my life as a young girl, which helped me realize my potential.

To my mother, Barbara Jackson, who has always believed in me and supported me unconditionally.

To my father, Michael Mitchell, who promoted education and made tremendous sacrifices so I could pursue my academic goals.

To my husband, Dennis J. Dove, who has supported me throughout my entire academic journey. For the countless nights I stayed up reading, studying, or writing a paper, while you cared for our children. For the numerous times I became frustrated and felt like giving up and you encouraged me to take a break, then get back to work... I thank you.

To my children who bring immense joy to my life and teach me how to be a better person.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the African American females who took part in this study. Thank you for being open and sharing such personal experiences with me regarding hair and hair care. To my dissertation chair, Laurie Powers, who I leaned on for support when life happened and I needed an extra push to continue this journey, who approached my topic with such enthusiasm and provided great mentorship, thank you. To my dissertation committee members, Tom Keller, thank you for your support and commitment from the beginning, as a member of my comps committee. Joy DeGruy and Veronica Dujon, thank you for all of your support and encouragement, but most importantly, your cultural knowledge and expertise regarding the African American experience. A personal acknowledgement to my PhD cohort. Thank you for enriching my experience in the PhD program. Our cohort is definitely one of a kind. I would also like to acknowledge my participant recruitment contacts with the Department of Human Services. Thank you for your time and support of this study. Finally, I would like to express sincere gratitude to my extremely supportive family members and friends- much appreciation to those who always saw my potential and believed in my ability to accomplish this major goal. Your consistent support and encouragement were exactly what I needed to keep on pushing. Thank you!

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	i
Dedication.....	iii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Chapter I: Introduction.....	1
The Current State of the Child Welfare System	
Importance of Culture and Cultural Socialization	
Negative Impacts of Not Addressing Cultural Needs	
The Value of Hair for African American Adolescents in Foster Care	
Summary	
Aims for Dissertation Research	
Importance to the Field of Social Work	
Contributions to Research	
Importance to Child Welfare Practice	
Importance to Child Welfare Policy	
Chapter II: Review of the literature.....	15
Collective Responsibility: African American Children	
and the Child Welfare System	
The Culture of Black Hair in America	
I am my Nywele	
Reclaiming our Nywele	
Media Portrayal of African American Women	
Links and Connections: Physical Appearance, self-esteem,	
and Standards of Beauty	
Ethnic Identity Development, Socialization, and Self-concept of	
Youth in Foster Care	
Summary	
Theoretical Framework	
Summary	
Research Questions	
Chapter III: Methods.....	46
Research design	
Sample	
Sampling and Recruitment	
Data Collection	
Data Analysis	
Pilot Test	
Chapter IV: Results.....	56
Participants' Profiles	

Researcher's Positioning	
Interview Findings	
Hair Care	
Perceptions of Hair and Identity as an African American Female	
Societal Influences on Self-awareness	
Influence of the Foster Care System	
Chapter V: Discussion.....	94
Theme 1: Hair Care	
Theme 2: Perceptions of Hair and Identity as an African American Female	
Theme 3: Societal Influences on Self-awareness	
Theme 4: Influence of the foster care system	
Emergent Recommendations for the Foster Care System	
Limitations	
Summary/Conclusion	
References.....	109
Appendix A – Portland State University Consent Form.....	120
Appendix B – Interview Guide.....	124
Appendix C – Demographic Questionnaire.....	129

Chapter I: Introduction

Widespread attention has been given to the disproportionate number of African American children in the child welfare system. In 2010 there were approximately 408,425 children in foster care- 48% of those children were placed in non-relative foster care, 26% in relative foster care, and the remaining 26% were in various other placements such as group homes, institutions, pre-adoptive homes, trial home visits, independent living, and runaway (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2011). African Americans comprised 29% of the children in foster care (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2011), even though they only represent 15% of the national child population (US Government Accountability Office, 2007). Scholars and researchers have explored factors that contribute to disproportionality and have provided recommendations for enhancing services in an attempt to address this problem, and to decrease the drastic number of African American children in the child welfare system (Billingsley and Giovannoni, 1972; Roberts, 2002; Everett, Chipungu, and Leashore, 2004; and Derezotes, Poertner, and Testa, 2005). Although scholars and researchers have conducted various empirical studies examining national, state, and local data over the past few decades (see Derezotes, Testa, & Poertner, 2005), there continues to be much debate and controversy surrounding the complexities of race and whether African American children are at greater risk for child maltreatment.

While major focus has been given to the important problem of disproportionality, less attention has been directed to the specific cultural needs of African American children once involved in the child welfare system. African American children involved in the system are at greater risk of receiving fewer services or substandard quality of services, and they are less likely to be adopted. Unfortunately, once involved in the foster care system, African American children also tend to have longer lengths of stay (Barth, 2005). According to the US Department of Health and Human Services (2011) in 2009, there were approximately 34, 100 African American children waiting to be adopted, and roughly 14, 200 were adopted from foster care. These statistics suggest that for those children who are not capable of reuniting with their parent/caretaker, the chances of remaining in the child welfare system seem to increase. For African American children, this may pose a greater risk of disconnection from biological families, communities, and cultural beliefs, values, and practices, especially if the case plan does not include reunification.

There are reasons to critically examine the specific needs of African American children in foster care. Concerted efforts have been made to reduce the number of children in care, and some attention given to their cultural needs, by attempting to maintain familial and cultural connections through kinship care, and by emphasizing cultural competency and sensitivity when working with African American families. However, additional attention needs to be devoted to identifying and implementing

practices and policies that promote cultural identity and connection to culture for African American children who linger in foster care.

The Current State of the Child Welfare System

When the public child welfare system was established, African American families were not offered the same level of services available to White families, which is an issue that continues to plague the system. During that time, African American families often utilized community-based establishments such as African American churches, day care/nurseries, schools, and voluntary associations to address their children's needs, and relied on informal practices to protect and care for African American children (Jimenez, 2006). Hegar and Scannapieco (1995) noted it was not until the expansion of the public child welfare system in the 1930's and federal funding in the 1960's that African American children began to receive formal child welfare services. The influx of African American children entering the child welfare system occurred during the 1960's, and unfortunately has remained virtually constant. Over the years there have been various attempts to significantly improve policies and practices that address the best interest of African American children, including a variety of policy perspectives such as expedient permanency, cultural continuity, family preservation, and social advantage (see Anyon, 2011).

Various policy and practice changes over the years have led to the adoption of two specific approaches geared toward African American children in the child welfare system. The first is kinship care, which has been a placement option that the child welfare

system has heavily utilized for African American children. Kinship care has been one of the most rapidly growing elements of out-of-home care since the 1980's (Harris and Skyles, 2008). African American children are twice as likely to be placed with kin compared to White children (Hill, 2004; Harris & Skyles, 2008). Researchers have documented the positive benefits of kinship care, such as maintaining emotional ties and connection to biological parents and extended family (Harris & Skyles, 2008), and found that African American adolescents in kinship care interpret their ethnic identity in a more positive light than those in non-kinship placements (Schwartz, 2007). However, there remains much debate and controversy about kinship care for African American children. Researchers have noted concern that kinship care placement contributes to lack of reunification with biological parents, leads to longer lengths of stay, and is associated with disparities in treatment and quality of services provided to families (Hill, 2004). Ultimately, many African American children in kinship placements still linger in the system without an established permanency plan.

A second approach used by the child welfare system to better serve African American children has been to improve the cultural competency of child welfare staff with the hope of developing culturally responsive policies and delivering culturally sensitive and appropriate services. After much frustration with the lack of changes regarding the conditions of African American children in the child welfare system, researchers were heavily involved with the movement to shift to the adoption of culturally-based perspectives (see Everett, 2004). The underlying message was to shift

from focusing on deficits within the African American family, to recognizing strengths and cultural practices, and acknowledging cultural differences. Everett (2004) asserts:

By using an Africentric perspective to examine child welfare policies and practices, we are asserting the importance of a cultural perspective. Taking a culturally based perspective can serve as a catalyst for creativity and innovation in the formulation of policies and practices used to secure safety and permanency for African American children (p. 5).

Researchers have examined specific aspects of the child welfare system from the point of entry, including how decisions are made once involved in the system, services provided to families, and exiting the system (Hill, 2004). The findings revealed that institutionalized attitudes and beliefs about African American families, rooted in racism, continue to be a prevailing issue. Hill notes that child welfare professionals “must disavow the belief that ‘different’ cultural values or practices are inherently ‘inferior’ to theirs” (p. 72).

Kinship care and cultural competency continue to be two approaches utilized to address the needs of African American children in the child welfare system. The focus of cultural competency efforts has been to increase staff awareness and identify strategies to better effectively meet the needs of African American families; examples would be the use of culturally specific services (see Beckett and Lee, 2004), and hiring staff of color. While yielding some benefits, these efforts alone do not adequately address the vast needs of African American children in foster care. In particular, these macro level approaches fail to specifically address the individual needs of African American youth in foster care. Culturally specific approaches must be identified for assessing and

responding to the cultural understanding and experiences of African American youth in foster care. Such approaches could shed light on how these youth view culture in their lives, and identify opportunities for youth to engage in cultural experiences that will promote healthy development. Culture is a key component to consider when assessing the needs of African American youth, and culture and cultural socialization are integral to shaping their self-concept.

Importance of Culture and Cultural Socialization

African American families' use of formal and informal practices to address the needs of African American children assists with the preservation of culture and cultural beliefs. These practices provide African American children with opportunities to be socialized in environments/community settings that are attuned to their cultural needs and help promote their development of a positive sense of self, rooted in connection to African American culture. Familial socialization and cultural exposure is essential to developing a positive ethnic identity and self-concept (Neblett, Smalls, Ford, Nguyen, and Sellers, 2009). African American children receive valuable messages regarding race, ethnicity, and culture that promote the development of a positive frame of reference for self-identity, self-worth, and comfort and affection that serve as a buffer against the negative consequences of racism (Murray and Mandara, 2002). Thus, African American children who linger in the child welfare system are at risk of losing their connection to African American cultural beliefs and practices, which in turn could deprive them of the

cultural socialization processes essential for developing healthy self-concept and self-esteem.

Negative Impacts of Not Addressing Cultural Needs

The potential impact of cultural disconnection on the lives of children involved in the system is profound. Research suggests there is an association between racial identity, psychological well-being and distress among African Americans (Caldwell, Zimmerman, Bernat, Sellers, and Notaro, 2002; Chae, Lincoln, and Jackson, 2011). Sellers, Caldwell, Schmeelk-Cone, and Zimmerman (2003) conducted a study among African American young adults and found that individuals who reported race as more central to their identity were more likely to report lower levels of subsequent psychological distress. The findings also support the notion that racial identity impacts perception of stress. Individuals who endorsed high race centrality (race as a central identity for participants) experienced less perceived stress that was not race related, compared to those who endorsed low race centrality (Sellers et al., 2003). Overall, individuals with low race centrality had greater experiences with racial discrimination with higher levels of distress. Sellers et al assert that high race centrality can be interpreted as a protective factor against the negative effects of racism and discrimination. This assertion is also supported by findings from a study conducted by Chae et al. that found that high levels of racial group identification buffered the adverse mental health effects of moderate levels of racial and non-racial discrimination. Thus, these studies suggest a strong link between racial identification and subsequent mental health and psychological well-being. Inherent

within racial identification is culture, and the cultural experiences and socialization processes which help define racial identity.

Studies suggest long-term foster care and multiple placements adversely impact ethnic identity development (Kools, 1997; White, O'Brien, Jackson, Havalchak, Phillips, Thomas, and Cabrera, 2008), and contribute to disconnection from family and significantly impacts self-identity (Kools, 1997). These findings imply the negative consequences of disconnection from culture, which is vital to the development of healthy sense of self, positive ethnic identity, and self-esteem. Hence culture is important for African American children in foster care because it serves as the blueprint for racial identity. The child welfare system must address this critical issue, as lack of attention only perpetuates the problem and leads to African American children who are at risk of developing internalized self-hatred, low self-esteem, and an unhealthy sense of self as a result of disconnection from culture.

Cultural socialization can be viewed through agents such as music, movies, and television shows (Schwartz, 2007). How one processes and internalizes these messages can impact sense of self and self-esteem. Unfortunately, the child welfare system's response to the cultural needs of African American children has been inadequate. The system is grossly lacking in policies and standards of practice tailored to address the essential cultural needs of African American children in foster care. As a result, some African American children are being deprived of cultural necessities that promote the development of a healthy sense of self. These children are at risk of a loss of connection

to African American cultural beliefs and practices, thus being deprived of the necessary socialization agents that are key for developing a healthy sense of self and self-esteem. These agents can be instrumental in learning about what it means to be African American.

The Value of Hair for African American Adolescents in Foster Care

Hair is uniquely prominent within African American culture (Banks, 2000), as a major socialization agent that significantly impacts self-concept and self-esteem. Banks conducted a qualitative study indicating that hair holds value whether good or bad, that age is a factor in how hair matters to Black women, and that there is a relationship between Black women and US beauty culture, and between hair and identity. Banks asserts “hair emerges as a body within the social body and can reflect notions about perceptions, identity, and self-esteem” (p. 26). African American females often receive subtle and not so subtle messages regarding physical appearance, and contained within these messages are attitudes about physical features such as hair texture, shape and size of the lips, and skin complexion (McAdoo, 2002). For many African American female adolescents in foster care, this essential process of socialization is compromised, which threatens the healthy development of self-concept and self-esteem. Phinney (1989) reported on the struggle African American female participants encountered when addressing the realization that the White standards of beauty, specifically hair and skin color, did not apply to them. This finding suggests that self-concept and self-esteem among African American female adolescents are largely impacted by socialization agents

such as hair. Hair is one of the most critical socialization agents for African American female adolescents and it is important to have a sound understanding of its history in order to grasp the connection to self-concept and self-esteem.

Understanding the history and culture of Black hair in America is vital to understanding why hair continues to matter when discussing self-concept and self-esteem among African American female adolescents. Hair is a cultural component that is important for African Americans in general, and the issue of hair is exacerbated for African American female adolescents in the child welfare system. The cultural significance of hair is not always apparent; however the manner in which African American females are socialized regarding hair can vary. Similar to the difference that exist in racial socialization and the extent to which parents racially socialize their children, variability with hair care experiences exist amongst caregivers within the child welfare system, both African American and non-African American caregivers. Some caregivers may be more adept to address issues related to hair and hair care, while others may lack knowledge and understanding. Overall, it is incumbent upon the child welfare system to take responsibility for recognizing and emphasizing the importance of hair.

Summary

The aforementioned discussion underscores that African American children are disproportionately represented in the child welfare system and, while taking steps to communicate the value of culture and cultural competence, the system is to a great extent failing to recognize and address the cultural needs of these children. It is imperative to

understand the value of culture for African Americans and what this means for children in foster care. One critical cultural component is hair. Although, the literature is replete with historical accounts of the culture of Black hair in America, there is scant research exploring hair and the implications of hair and sense of self and self-esteem. There is a pressing need to learn more about how hair functions within the lives of African American female adolescents in foster care. Thus, the aims of this dissertation study were to address this need.

The study investigated the importance of hair and hair care among African American female adolescents in foster care and how it may influence self-concept and self-esteem. It was my hope that this study would illuminate the importance of culture and cultural influence on identity development, increase awareness of factors that influence self-concept and self-esteem among African American female adolescents, and lead to the promotion of cultural opportunities and experiences that have a positive impact on the overall well-being of African American children in foster care.

Aims for Dissertation Research

The proposed study had the following four aims:

Aim 1: To investigate the importance of hair and hair care to African American female adolescents in foster care.

Aim 2: To investigate the influence of hair on identity, and self-esteem among African American female adolescents in foster care.

Aim 3: To explore the role that messages related to racial socialization play in shaping female adolescents' in foster care perceptions of hair and hair care experiences.

Aim 4: To investigate the needs of African American female adolescents in foster care around hair/hair care.

Importance to the Field of Social Work

Although basic understanding of the importance of culture is embraced within the field of social work, there appears to be a lack of understanding of what culture implies and how influential it is in the lives of African American youth. It is my hope that the findings from this study will illuminate the importance of culture and connection to culture for African American youth in foster care, and will help initiate dialog within the field of social work about how to best address the specific cultural needs of African American youth. It is also my hope that the findings will promote increased acknowledgement and understanding of the importance of hair and hair care for African Americans in general, and more specifically for African American youth in foster care.

Contributions to Research

This dissertation study contributes to the field of social work by enhancing knowledge regarding the cultural needs of African American children in the child welfare system. There is scant research that addresses the specific needs of African American children once involved in the system. The main goals of the study were to increase awareness of factors that influence self-concept and self-esteem among African American

adolescents, to highlight the importance of culture and cultural influence on identity development, and to promote the need for opportunities and experiences that have a positive impact on the overall well-being of African American children in foster care. Findings from this study address the gaps in research regarding African American children in foster care and clarify how African American female adolescents view hair and its relationship to sense of self, self-esteem, and connection to over-all well-being. The results of this study could be instrumental in developing cultural trainings and standards of practice regarding hair care within child welfare, and in promoting further research to test interventions.

Importance to Child Welfare Practice

The results of this study provide valuable information about how child welfare staff could help meet the cultural needs of African American children. In regards to hair care, there are practical aspects of African American hair that are important to know and understand, such as hair type/texture, styling preference (natural hair versus chemically relaxed hair), cost, and who to go to (someone properly trained to style African American hair) and where to go (beauty shop, braiding shop, etc.), based on styling preference. Findings from this study could potentially offer strategies for child welfare professionals to partner with various professionals in the community to serve as liaisons and community consultants for hair care. Establishing these partnerships and informing staff of these resources could reduce the chances of staff not knowing how to address hair care needs. In addition, these liaisons/consultants could potentially provide ongoing training

and education for child welfare staff and foster parents/caregivers who would benefit from understanding the cultural importance of hair and hair care for African Americans. Lastly, the findings could inform how to have a conversation with African American female adolescents in foster care regarding hair and how to address hair care needs.

Importance to Child Welfare Policy

Findings from this dissertation study could help with the development of policy strategies within the child welfare system to assess the cultural needs of African American children. Such strategies could include requirements for specific training that provide an introduction to African American culture and its importance to the development of African American children. Similar to an assessment of educational, medical, and mental health needs that typically occurs when a child first become involved with the system, the policy could mandate the assessment of culture that would explore cultural connection, for example connection to community, involvement with community activities (events/organizations/extracurricular activities), utilization of community services such as beauty/barber shops and hair supply stores. By mandating a cultural assessment for African American children, child welfare staff could gain an understanding of the cultural needs and potentially circumvent challenges related to these needs, while promoting the importance of cultural connection. In addition, a specific funding stream could be developed to provide assistance with paying for hair maintenance and hair care supplies.

Chapter II: Review of the Literature

This study was grounded in the recognition and understanding of the historical experiences of African American families involved in the child welfare system, and the history of Black hair in America. Both perspectives provide a basis for understanding the cultural importance of hair among African American female adolescents in foster care. This chapter provides a brief overview of the history of African Americans and the child welfare system and Black hair in America, a review of extant research related to physical appearance, self-esteem, and standards of beauty, and it examines theoretical and empirical knowledge related to racial socialization as a link between hair/hair care and the emergence of ethnic identity and self-concept.

Collective Responsibility: African American Children and the Child Welfare System

A detailed account of the history of the experiences of African American children in the child welfare system is beyond the scope of this dissertation study (see Billingsley & Giovannoni, 1972; Jimenez, 2006; and Smith and Devore, 2004), and this section will highlight key historical points that are essential to understanding the relationship of African American families and the child welfare system. The issue of disproportionality of African American children in the child welfare system has emerged over the past 50 years. Historically, families within the African American community relied on informal social networks and practices to protect and care for African American children. Prior to the construction of the legal child welfare system in America and its interest in

addressing the well-being of all children, African American families depended on family and community resources to address the needs of the children. Initially, the child welfare system exclusively addressed the needs of White children and African American children were largely unrepresented in the system (Billingsley & Giovannoni, 1972; Jimenez, 2006). The African American community naturally assumed the collective responsibility of parenting, raising, rearing, and caring for children whose parents could not adequately care for them (Jimenez, 2006).

Some Black historians assert that slavery was the first form of child welfare for African American children. “Until 1865 slavery was the major child welfare institution for Black children in this country, since that social institution had under its mantle the largest number of Black children” (Billingsley & Giovannoni, 1972, p. 23). During the period of slavery, a vast number of African American children were stripped from their families as a result of being bought and sold to another slave owner, and or endured the brutal separation of family due to parental death, or the buying and selling of a parent to another slave owner. Thus, Africans took on the collective responsibility of caring for and rearing the children. Derezotes and Poertner (2005) highlight how the definition of family for African Americans derives from the African concept of family, which is not confined to relations between formal kin, but includes networks of related and unrelated kin. Jimenez (2006) notes, “kin and community oversight was one thing African American children could depend on” (p. 892), and emphasizes how in the late 19th century, it was common practice for African American families to assume the

responsibility of caring for relatives for various reasons, without the formal oversight of the legal system (Jimenez, 2006). Additionally, Derezotes & Poertner assert that the extended family is one cultural structure that stems from West African practices and has provided the strength and support necessary for African American families to survive slavery in America. The concept of the extended family is an integral component of the African American family structure that continues to thrive among families, with an emphasis on the overall well-being of the children.

During the late 1800's, responses to addressing the needs of children varied from indentured service, almshouses, to orphanages. These services were not developed with African American children in mind, as they were virtually excluded from receiving services that were designed to cater to poor White children and families. Initially indentured service was the primary means of caring for poor children. Billingsley & Giovannoni (1972) postulated that during this time African Americans were treated harshly and there are some accounts that suggest some were forced into slavery. Almshouses emerged following the Revolutionary War and were developed to house those who could not care for themselves (Billingsley & Giovannoni, 1972). Orphanages were established following almshouses, targeting young children. Billingsley & Giovannoni assert prior to the Civil War, African American children were specifically excluded from orphanages as a matter of policy. As a result, colored orphanages emerged to address the needs of African American children.

Following the Civil War, the federal government established the Freedman's Bureau which was designed to assist poor White families and African Americans in the transition from enslavement to freedom. This effort was viewed as the governments' first attempt to directly address social conditions. The Bureau was instrumental in providing assistance to African American families, which positively impacted family life. Billingsley & Giovannoni (1972) report "the provision of land, work, and direct relief served poor Black children within their families, for it was a means of strengthening and keeping those families together" (p. 43). This approach and the services provided were unprecedented, but unfortunately the gain was short lived, and the Bureau was dismantled a few years following its establishment. African American families struggled with restoring life without any governmental assistance. As in the past, families relied on the community for help. Billingsley & Giovannoni assert "in spite of almost overwhelming oppression and the absence of adequate or even rudimentary resources, Black families have shown a spirit of benevolence which deserves to be appreciated and supported in the more general approaches to child welfare today" (p. 42). The most notable sources of aid within the community were exclusively Black establishments such as churches, schools/colleges, lodges, women's clubs, and individual philanthropy (Billingsley & Giovannoni, 1972). These services were very instrumental in addressing the needs of the community and promoted the well-being of African American children well into the 20th century.

In conjunction with the changing times in America, the child welfare system gradually shifted from the practice of segregating African American children from the system to providing services, largely through public agencies. However, racist and discriminatory beliefs were pervasive and African American children were still being labeled 'delinquent' and sent to adult facilities such as jails, workhouses, and prisons (Billingsley & Giovannoni, 1972). Billingsley & Giovannoni offer three potential explanations for the shift toward serving African American children. 1) the migration of African American families from the south to the north, 2) the decrease of poor White children needing services, and 3) the nation's change in ideology from segregation to integration. The combination of these factors contributed to the increase of African American children entering the child welfare system.

During the 1960's, there was a surge of African American children entering the child welfare system. Today African American children continue to be disproportionately represented in the system nationwide. The system has made improvements in recognizing some culturally specific practices when caring for African American children, while seeming oblivious of other culturally practices. Of major importance, community reliance was essential for African Americans and contributed to the preservation of cultural beliefs and practices. As African American families gained access to child welfare services, African American children began to experience isolation and disconnection from their communities and exposure to cultural traditions. Disconnection continues to be a problem and there is an urgent need within the child welfare system to begin critically

exploring cultural needs of African American children and offering culturally specific services to address those needs.

One crucial cultural factor for African American females that has received very little attention is hair. For African Americans hair is very complex and often a sensitive subject to discuss. However, it is important for those working with African American children in the child welfare system to understand why hair matters.

The Culture of Black Hair in America

When discussing this country's history of the enslavement of Africans, also known as the Maafa, many fail to acknowledge and understand the residual effects of removing Africans from various regions, ethnic affiliations and tribes, and the adverse impact this act had on their sense of knowing and being. Remarkably, once Africans arrived to the new land (America) they ingeniously managed to preserve elements of their traditional culture and practices. Several links and connections have been made to the longstanding traditional practices of West African cultures and practices among African Americans such as spiritual beliefs and rituals, song and dance, and family/parenting values (Banks, 2000; Byrd and Tharps, 2001; and Sieber and Herreman, 2000). Despite many traditions and practices that were lost amidst the era of enslavement, there are still remnants of African culture infused in the mundane lives of African Americans. Today many admire the versatility and intricate styling of Black women's hair, but few understand the historical backdrop entangled in the roots of the culture of Black hair in America.

I am my Nywele (*Kiswahili for hair*). To understand the current state of Black hair culture in America, we must journey back to a time and place where one's hairstyle did more than symbolize freedom or covertly convey the political meanings among African Americans, a time when hair and hairstyle signified who you were and where you came from. In their book "Hair Story: Untangling the Roots of Black Hair in America", Byrd & Tharps (2001) emphasize the importance of capturing the cultural significance of hair for African Americans by exploring the essence and function of hair among West African cultures. They eloquently state that "the one constant Africans share when it comes to hair is the social and cultural significance intrinsic to each beautiful strand" (Byrd & Tharps, 2001, p. 1). Africans basked in their well established and highly regarded cultural practices and traditions that distinguished them from other ethnic groups and tribes, but allowed them to share a common reverence for hair. Byrd & Tharps (2001) note "ever since African civilizations bloomed, hairstyles have been used to indicate a person's marital status, age, religion, ethnic identity, wealth, and rank within the community" (p. 2). Thus for African civilizations, hair was more than just hair it was a true representation of a person's existence and symbolized a person's heritage.

The art of braiding is a cultural practice that is very prominent among African Americans. The term cornrows is used to refer to a particular braiding style. This specific style of braiding has been prevalent in Africa for centuries. Van Sertima (1988) iterates that this practice can be traced back five thousand years to the Sahara. According to Yarbrough (1988) over the course of thousands of years, this style of braiding became

more elaborate and symbolic of social status. Cornrows have historically been worn by men and women. To date, African American men and women continue to embrace this style of braiding. Learning how to braid was an essential skill, and within the Yoruba culture all women were taught how to braid (Byrd & Tharps, 2001). Braiding represents a social act as well. Within some West African cultures, asking someone to braid your hair was a way of seeking friendship (Byrd & Tharps, 2001). Essentially, hair was viewed as an extension of your being. Given the importance of hair, it was not uncommon to suspect something was wrong when a woman presented as unkempt or disheveled (Byrd & Tharps, 2001). Unfortunately for African Americans, the generational transmission of the cultural significance and importance of hair was interrupted by the banning of traditional West African cultural practices once Africans arrived in America. This disruption led to hair taking on an entirely new meaning for African Americans, which is the impetus of the phenomenon of Black hair culture in America.

Newly arrived Africans in America were not only prohibited from engaging in traditional cultural beliefs and practices, they were also prohibited from utilizing essential products necessary for hair and grooming. Without access to these bare necessities, enslaved Africans resorted to other means of caring for their hair. In addition to the challenge of discovering ways to attend to grooming, enslaved Africans endured psychological torture, as the practice of shaving the heads of Africans was widespread. According to Byrd & Tharps (2001) this practice was implemented by Europeans and could be interpreted as an attempt to remove one's identity. The prohibition of the use of

the comb and other key products was very disparaging for enslaved Africans. By scrutinizing the physical attributes of enslaved Africans, Europeans were successful in creating a toxic division that continues to plague African Americans. Many enslaved Africans began to internalize these messages and developed a sense of self-hatred, while others refuted these messages by embracing their African heritage and clinging to their traditional practices and beliefs. Following the abolishment of slavery, African Americans struggled with creating a new life and redefining what it meant to be of African descent living in America. Intertwined in this struggle was the quest to come to terms with hair, a pursuit that would span decades.

Reclaiming our Nywele. During the period of enslavement, Africans experienced the destructive effects of the implementation of a social structure that continues to have the same damaging effects, primarily for African American females. Many enslaved Africans were the product of miscegenation and as a result they had European features such as lighter skin and straighter hair. These attributes were considered more favorable by Europeans compared to dark skin Africans with natural/ kinky hair. Inevitably, this favoritism created a social structure and hierarchy that spearheaded a toxic division among light and dark-skinned Africans. Byrd & Tharps (2001) provide the following summary: “Black people themselves internalized the concept and within their own ranks propagated the notion that dark-skinned Blacks with kinkier hair were less attractive, less intelligent, and worth less than their lighter-skinned brothers and sister” (p. 19). This division coined the term “good hair,” which is a colloquial phrase commonly used by

African Americans to refer to straight, European like hair. Those with hair that was natural, wooly, or kinky were considered to have “bad hair.”

Within the African American community, there was a great divide amongst highly regarded African American leaders. One school of thought (assimilationist) promoted embracing European culture and traditions in regards to physical appearance (i.e. dress, hair), while their opponents (nationalists) denounced this notion and strongly encouraged African Americans to embrace and honor their African heritage, by liberating themselves from European influences (i.e. promotion of natural hair) and returning to traditional African beliefs and practices. It is not surprising that hair was the essential characteristic that signaled this division, as “hair was considered the most telling feature of Negro status” (Byrd & Tharps, 2001, p. 17).

As African Americans strived to move forward, they continued to be confronted with the dilemma of hair and obsession with straight hair and European features. During the progressive era, African American women were being encouraged to attempt to assimilate to dominant European culture, by denouncing their natural aesthetic and physical attributes, and striving to become beautiful as defined by Europeans. The message was loud and clear, and manufacturers of hair straightening products urged African American women to straighten their hair in an effort to foster societal acceptance (Rooks, 1996). Many African American women acknowledged this request and engaged in the practice of hair straightening, while others held steadfast to accepting and embracing their natural physical features and kinky hair. Unfortunately, African

American women fell prey to the myth that by changing their physical appearance, they somehow would improve their social status within the larger society.

The intraracial conflict and great debate regarding hair would continue to wax and wane as African American women moved toward positioning themselves within American society. There was a slight shift in focus from emphasis on the symbolism of hair, to what to do with our hair. Byrd & Tharps (2001) highlight how the beauty ideal at the time overwhelmingly favored light skin, straight hair as the standard of beauty, without much consideration for the Black beauty ideal. The mid-60's birthed the revolution of Black hair. "Hair came to symbolize either a continued move toward integration in the American political system or a growing cry for Black power and nationalism" (Byrd & Tharps, 2001, p. 51). Since arriving to America, this was the first time African Americans put forth a collective effort to embrace their African roots and take pride in their heritage. Hair was used as a visual representation of this movement toward Black pride. The afro was highly associated with this movement, which became synonymous with activism and political consciousness (Rooks, 1996). During the mid-80's and early 90's, African American women continued to deal with the debacle regarding the politics of hair. However, this era brought a new perspective with an emphasis on choice for African American women in regards to hair. During this time, African Americans (men and women) embraced various hairstyling techniques and supported versatility in regards to hair. There was a surge of elaborate and intricate hair styles from cornrows, hair weaves and extensions, to twist and dreadlocks.

The history of the culture of Black hair in America suggests that as African Americans, we will continue to recognize the importance of hair, particularly for African American females. Hair is a reflection of physical appearance and influences self-concept and self-esteem, and it is a very influential factor among African American adolescent girls and women that is often interconnected with one's perception of self.

Media Portrayal of African American Women

As noted earlier, the influence of messages conveyed through media (television and magazines) is another source that impacts how African American women view themselves. Historically, African American women have been excluded from the media. Over time, however, there has been a substantial increase in the presence of African American women in the media. This presence, however, has been highly selective (Perkins, 1996). The media is overwhelmingly dominated by the portrayal of White women, emphasizing the dominant culture's standards of beauty. These standards are based on the idealization of European features such as a thin body, and long, straight hair. In comparison with these standards, the African American woman and her unique physical attributes are generally overlooked, and devalued in mainstream society. Okazawa-Rey, Robinson, and Ward (1986) note "the attributes society assigns to the 'attractive' and 'unattractive' Black female have profound implications for her psychosocial development (p. 13). Thus, one must understand how dominant culture's standards of beauty may be impacting African American women's beauty ideal and

influencing self-concept and self-esteem. This can be explored through the few studies that examine the perceptions of women of color regarding images portrayed in the media.

One of the few studies that addresses beauty ideal and the influence of media was conducted by Poran (2002) and included Black, Latina, and White women, ranging in age from 17-42. These women attended colleges located in the East. Poran found that the majority of the participants provided a definition of beauty that included both personality traits and physical characteristics, and regardless of race, participants provided a definition of a cultural standard of beauty similar to the dominant culture's standards of beauty. This finding corroborates the struggle previously discussed regarding African American women who ascribe to mainstream ideals and struggle to accept oneself. Parker, Nichter, Nichter, Vuckovic, Sims, and Ritenbaugh (1995) reported similar findings among a group of African American female adolescents. They discovered that African American girls were keenly aware of differences in beauty ideals between African American and dominant White culture. The participants provided a description of the ideal African American girl that emphasized personality traits rather than physical features. These studies indicate that African American adolescent females and women are impacted by the dominant culture's standards of beauty, which could potentially have a negative impact on self-concept and self-esteem, depending on how one may internalize these standards. Turnage's (2004) findings support this notion that the African American female adolescent receives messages about her appearance and has to contend with these

messages, and determine whether she chooses to conform and alter her physical appearance or embrace her ethnic appearance.

Links and Connections: Physical Appearance, Self-esteem, and Standards of Beauty

When reviewing the literature regarding physical appearance, self-esteem, and standards of beauty, one thing that seems to be consistent is the importance placed on the messages African American females receive from family, peers, and society in general, about what it means to be an African American female. These messages can largely impact self-concept and self-esteem. Parker et al. (1995) assert, “in a context in which the beauty standards of the larger society are often the antithesis of African American physical attributes (facial features, body shape, body size, and hair), positive feedback from other members of the African American community is important” (p. 109). Thus, it is critical for African American females to be surrounded by positive individuals who not only affirm Black physical attributes, but provide support for what is considered appropriate hair care. These individuals could be family, community members, peers, or mentors, who will also help to counteract/buffer the negative messages and social experiences that could potentially have an aversive impact on the construction of a positive, healthy self-concept and self-esteem.

Many of the research studies that include African American women focus primarily on issues of body image, physical appearance, standards of beauty, and self-esteem (Ofosu, Lafreniere, and Senn, 1998; Falconer and Neville, 2000; Coard, Breland, and Raskin, 2001; and James, Phelps, and Bross, 2001). All of these studies include

college age African American women and do not capture the perspective of African American adolescents. One could assume that these women, compared to adolescents, are more capable of considering the significance of their perception of these issues due to maturity and educational exposure. However, these studies may be helpful in understanding the link that hair, as a part of one's physical appearance, has to self-concept and self-esteem. Review of these studies will provide an understanding of how physical appearance, self-esteem, and standards of beauty are connected and impact the lives of African American female adolescents.

Of the research findings available, Turnage (2004) is one of few studies that examined the relationship between global self-esteem, body image (appearance evaluation) and ethnic identity among African American female adolescents. This study surveyed 105 African American female high school students, ages 16-18. The findings revealed that appearance evaluation was positively and significantly correlated with global self-esteem, and that ethnic identity achievement (scores from a subscale of the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure-MEIM) (Phinney, 1992) was positively and significantly correlated with global self-esteem: 60% reported having both high global self-esteem and high appearance evaluation, and 51% scored high on both global self-esteem and ethnic identity development. In reporting these findings, Turnage suggested that the relationship between appearance evaluation and ethnic identity achievement may be impacted by the protective factor of ethnic pride and respect. This study supports the notion that how one perceives oneself is strongly associated to self-esteem, and notes the

importance of a healthy ethnic identity. “to enhance and protect her global self-esteem, the picture an African American female carries of herself must include cultural information” (Turnage, 2004, p. 30). While the findings from this study are limited, nevertheless this study contributes important information regarding the connections between body image, self-esteem, and ethnic identity.

Researchers have also conducted studies of youth of color not involved with the child welfare system to gather a better understanding of the processes these youth encounter when attempting to discover self and establish their identity. Plummer (1995) found that a sample of 174 African American adolescents (ages 14-18) who attended predominately White private schools, primarily endorsed internalization attitudes (having a high degree of comfort with being African American, while also recognizing and appreciating other ethnic/racial heritages) on The Black Racial Identity Attitude Scale (RIAS-B). Plummer speculated that the racial socialization process (messages received from family and community) these youth experienced may have contributed to their responses, and she emphasized the possible opportunities afforded to these youth who were “generally been able to celebrate African American culture openly, view African American television programs and films, and have witnessed professional African Americans in positions of influence” (p. 174). These findings demonstrate the importance of messages conveyed to youth as the messages could be internalized, suggesting that the context in which identity formation occurs is important.

One of the most significant contributions to the literature regarding hair is an ethnographic research study conducted by Banks (2000), which became the basis for her book entitled “Hair matters: Beauty, power, and black women’s consciousness.” Banks conducted 43 individual interviews and five focus groups involving African American girls and women to explore why hair matters. The participants ranged in age from 13 to 76. Banks findings revealed that the discussion of why hair matters extends beyond grooming practices and esthetics. The findings indicated that hair holds value whether good or bad, that age is a factor in how hair matters to Black women, and that there is a relationship between Black women and US beauty culture, and between hair and identity, all of which are factors that shape identity formation around hair.

Although few studies have focused on African American adolescent females, we can analyze findings from studies including African American women to conceptualize how various elements (physical appearance, self-esteem, standards of beauty) are interconnected. Much of what we know about African American women’s perception of physical appearance (i.e. skin complexion, hair) has been gleaned from research on African American female college students. Smith, Burlew, and Lundgren (1991) surveyed 150 African American college students to assess the association of Black consciousness (as defined as a measure of one’s Black identity development), self-esteem and satisfaction with physical appearance. The findings suggested that the higher a woman’s self-esteem, the more satisfied she was with her overall appearance, including facial appearance. As predicted, Smith et al. found that women who had low Black

consciousness also had low self-esteem. In regards to facial features, women with more African facial features and high Black consciousness were more satisfied with their overall appearance compared to women with low Black consciousness, which is a significant finding given the media portrayal of African American women and the devaluation of African features. These findings highlight the correlation between identity development and self-esteem, and suggest there is a benefit to being grounded in who you are (ethnic identity) and comfortable with your physical appearance.

During the 1930's and 1940's, Kenneth B. Clark and his wife Maime Clark conducted "doll studies" that later proved to be integral in the decision of Brown vs. Board of Education to dismantle segregation. These studies included young Black children with White and Black dolls. The children were asked questions such as which doll they would play with, which doll is the nice doll, which one is bad, and which one has the nicer color. Findings from these experiments suggested internalized racism and self-hatred among Black children (see Clark & Clark, 1940; and Clark & Clark, 1947).

Ethnic Identity Development, Socialization, and Self-concept of Youth in Foster Care

The literature addressing the transition of adolescents from foster care is replete with dismal outcomes. These children are often at greater risk of experiencing high rates of educational failure, unemployment, poverty, mental illness, and housing instability (Courtney, 2009). Within the past decade, researchers have been interested in exploring identity development among adolescents in the child welfare system, and due to the

disproportional representation of youth of color in child welfare, many of the study participants have been youth of color. In addition, there has been some research exploring ethnic identity development specifically among adolescents of color.

Adolescence is a developmental stage where youth begin to assert their independence and explore who they are. Erikson (1968) is known for his contribution to establishing the theoretical foundation of adolescent psychosocial development, emphasizing the task of identity development. During the stage of adolescence (12 to 18 years of age), there is an emphasis on social relationships and the adolescent's developmental task of establishing a sense of self and personal identity. Erikson's theory has been critiqued for what some researchers suggest is a lack of consideration of the role culture plays in influencing identity development, specifically gender and racial/ethnic identity. Stevens (1997) highlights the importance of culture during this stage and notes "cultural dissonance is a core dilemma that comes to the forefront for the African American female at the onset of adolescence. Moreover, she perceives, in a new way, not only the societal devaluation of her gender, but more importantly, societal devaluation of her as a member of a racial minority, her reference group" (p. 149-150).

Erikson's theory provided a foundation for understanding why assessment of identity during this developmental stage is important. Kools (1997) addresses how Erikson's theory emphasizes how historical events and experiences lay the foundation that will either promote or hinder identity development. This stage is important within the developmental context of identity for youth in foster care. There are so many factors that

influence who you are from appearance, peers, where you are from, where you belong, and how this is compounded by being a youth in foster care.

There are a few studies that highlight the experiences of children of color in the child welfare system in relation to identity development (Kools, 1999; White et al., 2008; and Daughtery, 2011). Of those studies, Kools (1997) used intensive interviews, observation, and case records analysis to examine the experiences of 17 adolescents residing in group or family foster homes, and found that living in long-term foster care had a negative impact on the central process of adolescent identity development. This particular study addressed two important factors. First, Kools described how a child in foster care may align his/her self-concept to reflect the perceptions of others, thus resulting in a stigmatized self-identity and low self-esteem. Second, she highlighted the challenges a child in foster care faces when trying to forge an understanding of who he or she is, and strongly emphasized how disconnection from family significantly impacts self-identity.

Another study conducted by Schwartz (2007) used semi-structured interviews, survey, and case file analysis to explore differences in ethnic identity among adolescents in kinship placements and those in non-kinship placements. Although this comparative study included a small sample size (9 kinship and 9 non-kinship youth), the findings suggested that adolescents in kinship placements interpreted their ethnic identity in a more positive light than did those in non-kinship placements. Adolescents in kinship placements seemed to go beyond learning about their ethnic tradition to experiencing it

through involvement with other African Americans and in cultural activities. These findings suggest that there may be a natural process that occurs within families. One could surmise that family lineage, family roles, and the importance of family significantly influences and shapes ethnic identity development. In contrast, White et al. (2008) suggest a link between multiple placements and greater difficulties with ethnic identity, as changing placements serves as a barrier for adolescents in learning about their ethnic background. Based on research, it is plausible to surmise Black youth in care have a desire to learn about their cultural background and ethnic identity and they should be provided opportunities to engage in learning about who they are and where they come from. However, this may prove to be a challenging task for youth who are faced with the uncertainty of being in foster care and lacking a permanent home.

These limited studies highlight potential connections between identity development and self-esteem for youth in foster care. However, very little information is available on the associations of ethnic identity and self-concept for youth in care, and research has not been conducted to specifically examine these associations for female adolescents in care or to explore the relationship of hair to ethnic identity or self-concept.

Summary

Taken as a whole, historical analysis and findings from research regarding racial socialization, ethnic identity, physical appearance, self-esteem, and standards of beauty, suggest that hair is a powerful social agent that substantively impacts the lives of African American women. With the exception of Banks (2000), to date there does not appear to

be published research that examines the influence of hair on self-concept and self-esteem among African American female adolescents. Further, researchers have not examined the importance of hair or the associations of hair with self-concept and self-esteem among females who are isolated from traditional cultural influences provided by family and community; in particular adolescent girls in foster care. Building further understanding of the cultural significance of hair and its function as a socialization agent in promoting the self-concept and self-esteem of African American female adolescents in foster care could yield new knowledge related to how hair and hair care could serve as the link to connect these adolescents to their culture, empowering them to be prideful in who they are as African Americans. The results from such research will be tangible and the impact on the self-concept and self-esteem of African American female adolescents could be invaluable.

Those who understand the history of Black hair in America are often aware of the challenges African American females encounter, thus at an early age, caregivers began to equip young African American girls with the necessary tools to counteract the negative images, stereotypes, and perspectives that exist in society about what it means to be an African American woman. This practice of preparing African American youth for such encounters is rooted in the theoretical framework of racial socialization, which is discussed in the following section.

Theoretical Framework

Racial socialization is a key theoretical framework that addresses the developmental processes of children and adolescents, and provides an explanation for the emergence of positive ethnic identity and sense of self. It provides a foundation for understanding how the process of identity development differs for African American youth. This framework is helpful in understanding the benefits of exposure to culture and cultural experiences, and the drawbacks of lack of exposure for African American youth who are in the process of constructing and understanding their sense of self and ethnic identity.

Racial socialization is a construct that pertains to the development of children and adolescents, specifically the influence that ethnicity and culture have on shaping sense of self. Lesane-Brown (2006) defines racial socialization as “specific verbal and non-verbal (e.g., modeling of behavior and exposure to different contexts and objects) messages transmitted to younger generations for the development of values, attitude, behaviors, and beliefs regarding the meaning and significance of race and racial stratification, intergroup and intragroup interactions, and personal and group identity” (p. 403).

Lesane-Brown (2006) suggests that there are three key areas of expression of racial socialization: 1) prevalence of racial socialization based on socio-demographic factors/parent’s race socialization experiences and children’s characteristics; 2) content (frequency); and 3) racial socialization as a predictor of child and adult outcomes, specifically racial identity and functioning as an African American. As noted by Lesane-Brown, one area that has been widely studied is content. For example, Thornton,

Chatters, Taylor, and Allen (1990) conducted a study that asked Black parents to provide self-reports of their socialization practices with their children. These messages ranged from working hard, having good citizenship and moral values, and emphasizing racial pride themes involving Black heritage and historically Black traditions, recognition and acceptance of racial background, and maintaining a positive self-image. Some parents acknowledged race as a primary factor when discussing their socialization practices for their children, while other parents did not indicate race had an important role during the socialization process.

In relation to this study, racial socialization provides a basic framework for understanding the importance of hair as a major socialization agent that impacts self-esteem and sense of self. Hair is a key cultural element, especially for African American females. This framework suggests that exposure to culture through sources such as family, connection to the community, and media impact African American female adolescents in foster care. In addition, it suggests that the type and amount of exposure can significantly impact sense of self and ethnic identity development. For example, if African American female adolescents in foster care engage in cultural activities and maintain a connection to the community, it is likely this will have a significant impact and lead to positive ethnic identity and sense of self, as suggested by research previously discussed (see Schwartz, 2007). One can surmise that if African American female adolescents in foster care understand and are aware of their hair care needs, have access to appropriate hair care (i.e. education, products, beauty/braid shops, and personal

connections to someone they trust to ask questions regarding their hair), and are able to have conversations with African American females about hair and their hair care experiences (good and bad), then this could potentially increase their likelihood of developing a positive ethnic identity, sense of self, and positively influence their self-esteem. It is also possible that these approaches would help affirm some, but not all African American traits. Through hair care, African American females are able to reinforce their beauty, physical attributes, take pride in their heritage, and have high regard for themselves.

Racial socialization helps to explain why hair is such a major factor in the United States among African Americans compared to other ethnicities, and how Black hair care has become a billion dollar industry. As previously discussed, the history of the culture of Black hair in America shapes perceptions, ideas, and beliefs about hair. Given the cultural value placed on hair, these perceptions, ideas, beliefs, and as racial socialization suggests messages, influence sense of self and self-esteem for African American females.

Racial socialization provides a basis for understanding the complexity of hair care among African Americans, by highlighting the importance of messages received regarding hair and how these messages are processed and internalized. However, it does not fully explain the associations between culture, hair, ethnic identity, sense of self, and self-esteem. There are still a lot of gaps regarding racial socialization and much of the research has focused on examining how parents racially socialize their children. Neblett et al. (2009) note further research is needed to explore the nature of racial socialization

processes and mechanisms that underlie the relationship between racial socialization and positive youth development. The purpose of this study is to attempt to delineate the associations of racial socialization and culture (specifically hair as a socialization agent), and its impact on sense of self and self-esteem among African American female adolescents in foster care. This study will also attempt to further enhance theory development regarding the associations.

Researchers have conducted studies of African American families to understand the influence of racial socialization on the development of African American children, with results indicating the importance of racial socialization for African American children. These studies highlight the types of messages parents convey to their children, investigate how these messages are interpreted by adolescents, examine the influence these messages have on identity, and note the importance of kinship support (Lesane-Brown, 2006; Neblett et al., 2009). Most of the research consists of parents reflecting upon their patterns of socialization and past experiences regarding their children and race. The findings from Thornton et al. (1990) are corroborated by those from a longitudinal study conducted by Neblett et al. that included 358 African American adolescents (middle and high school students, ages 11-17) and examined patterns of racial socialization and their association to racial identity. The researchers used latent class analyses to identify different clusters of racial socialization messages and behaviors. These clusters included high positive (36.6%), moderate positive (40.8%), and low frequency (22.6%). Neblett et al. found that the high and moderate clusters of racial

socialization consisted of adolescents who reported parental emphasis on racial pride and self-worth messages. Adolescents also identified racial barriers, egalitarian messages, and socialization behaviors to be significant aspects of racial socialization. There was a significant main effect for cluster group membership, suggesting patterns of racial socialization may influence subsequent racial identity. The results also suggested that messages regarding self-respect and pride about being African American, and activities centered on African American culture, are both important factors that African Americans attribute to being African American (Neblett et al., 2009). These findings suggest a direct link between parental racial socialization and racial identity, based on the experiences of a sample of African American adolescents. They also suggest that the process of socialization (i.e. method and frequency for transmitting information) may be more influential than the content, as adolescents in the low frequency (racial socialization) cluster still endorsed what could be viewed as healthy aspects of racial identity (Neblett et al., 2009).

When assessing racial socialization, it is also important to explore influences outside of the immediate family that may play a role. In this regard, Stevenson, Reed, and Bodison (1996) conducted a study among adolescents to explore their experiences of support. The results indicated youth who reported having high and moderate levels of support on The Kinship Support Scale (KSS) were significantly higher in extended family caring than those youth who reported low levels of support on the KSS. Youth who endorsed high extended kinship support had higher scores on measures of cultural

pride reinforcement and spiritual coping beliefs, when compared to youth who endorsed moderate and low extended kinship support. Stevenson, Reed, & Bodison surmised that lack of experiencing a supportive extended family environment may impede one's ability to internalize the significance and importance of racial socialization for African American families. These findings emphasize the instrumental role of family and how the amount of support received is important and connected to ethnic identity and sense of self.

These studies highlight the key role of parental racial socialization practices among children and adolescents. However, for African American youth in foster care, it is plausible to assume this socialization process may be compromised, as these youth are often disconnected from their families and their communities. Youth in care may encounter vastly different experiences in regards to racial socialization, which could negatively impact their racial/ethnic identity development. Neblett et al. (2009) propose "the need for youth interventions and policy efforts that promote the African American family as a social institution that provide opportunities to celebrate being African American and learn about the reality of being African American in this society, within the context of a supportive and self-affirming environment" (p. 199). For African American youth in foster care, it may be necessary to explore other ways to support the racial socialization process, as Sanders Thompson (1994) found racial socialization by other family members to be strongly related to racial identity. Research has demonstrated that racial socialization significantly influences identity development overall. Therefore it

is also important to explore how the process of identity development unfolds for ethnic children and adolescents involved in the child welfare system.

Given the conditions of African American adolescents in foster care, it is plausible that the experiences of racial socialization and path to identity development look vastly different when compared to African American youth who are fortunate to experience this process within the context of their biological families and communities. These findings solidify the importance of racial socialization and ethnic identity development, and provide an understanding of why this process is critical for African American adolescents.

Summary

Theoretical and empirical knowledge on racial socialization informed the aims of this study by creating a context for understanding the hair care experiences of African American female adolescents in foster care, based on their exposure or lack thereof to culture, which in turn impacts sense of self and self-esteem. These experiences are essential as they influence how they view themselves and who they are as African Americans. As previously discussed, there is little research that explores the connection of hair to sense of self and self-esteem among African Americans. Existing research suggests there is a link, but it does not explore these connections in depth, unearthing how or why these connections exist.

Research questions

This study was designed to explore the current hair and hair care perceptions and experiences of African American female adolescents in foster care, specifically examining their attitudes, behaviors, beliefs, and socialization messages regarding hair, and the association of hair and hair care with their identity and self-esteem. It was my hope that gathering a snapshot of their perceptions and experiences also would lead to a deeper theoretical understanding of which elements are important in addressing hair and hair care, and identify strategies/approaches that are effective and ineffective for supporting the hair care of these adolescents. Thus, the following research questions were investigated.

- 1) How important is hair to African American female adolescents in foster care?
What are their hair care experiences?
- 2) How does hair and hair care influence how African American female adolescents in foster care view their identity and self-esteem?
- 3) What role do messages from others relating to racial socialization play in shaping African American female adolescents' perceptions of hair/hair care?
- 4) What strategies do African American female adolescents report adults use to meet their hair care needs, and to what extent are those strategies perceived as beneficial?

- 5) How does being in foster care affect how African American female adolescents view their hair and manage hair care?
- 6) What recommendations do African American female adolescents in foster care have for promoting the importance of culture and its connection to hair and hair care?

Chapter III: Methods

Research Design

This exploratory study used grounded theory to examine the relationship of hair and hair care, with self-concept and self-esteem among African American female adolescents in foster care. This study attempted to understand the hair care experiences of African American female adolescents in foster care, how hair influences sense of self and self-esteem, how racial socialization shapes perception regarding hair, and how the child welfare system can support the importance of hair and hair care. Grounded theory is a useful method when there is little or no knowledge in a particular area. It is also useful when attempting to understand how people define and experience situations within a particular context/setting. There is very little information available that explores the hair care experiences of African American female adolescents in foster care. The racial socialization literature suggests that African American female adolescents may encounter situations that influence/shape their perception of hair/hair care and how they view themselves. This study investigated the unique experiences of African American female adolescents in foster care and how they experience hair/hair care within this particular setting. This qualitative study used purposive sampling and individual interviews to explore perceptions of hair and hair care among African American female adolescents in foster care.

Sample

Study participants included 11 female adolescents who self-identified as African American. Given the complexities among other ethnic groups within the Black race who have immigrated to the United States, this study was interested in capturing the experiences of United States born African Americans. It was important to consider the specific experiences of African American females within the context of the historical perceptions of African American females and hair in America. Participants included females ranging in ages from 13-17, who were under guardianship of the Department of Human Services (DHS), and had been involved with DHS for at least one year. This age population was targeted given that developmentally this is the stage where identity development blossoms and adolescents can encounter challenges as they attempt to establish a sense of self.

Sampling and Recruitment

This study used a purposive sampling method. This study was conducted in a metropolitan city that is predominately White, with a small percentage of African Americans. Multnomah County was targeted for sample recruitment because it is the home of a large proportion of African Americans. This study was interested in understanding a broad range of experiences of African American female adolescents in foster care, including the experiences of African American female adolescents residing in various settings such as relative and non-relative placements, non African-American care providers placements, residential care, and group homes. This study was also interested

in recruiting participants who were closely connected to the African American community (i.e. involved with community-based activities/organization, culturally specific services, etc.), and who were not closely connected to the community. The plan was to recruit youth from a variety of lived experiences to ensure participants with different experiences were included. This study collaborated with DHS to enroll participants.

Various recruitment strategies were implemented over a period of 4 months. The researcher met with a representative from the DHS research committee to discuss recruitment strategies within the agency. The representative served as a point of contact throughout the study and sent a detailed e-mail, drafted by the researcher, to the DHS listserv (including DHS staff, caseworkers, and community partners) to assist with recruitment. Information detailing the study was shared with DHS caseworkers/staff through a flier distributed via e-mail. The researcher's telephone number and e-mail were included on the flyer so that DHS staff/caseworkers could contact the researcher regarding potential participants. The researcher communicated with caseworkers via e-mail and telephone about potential participants, and then determined whether the caseworker would contact the youth regarding participating in the study, or the researcher would be provided with the youth's contact information to discuss participation in the study. The researcher explained the study and reviewed the informed consent (see Appendix A) with the youth, and obtained assent from the youth and legal consent from the caseworker. The researcher coordinated with the youth or care provider to schedule

the interview and determined a place to meet. During the recruitment phase, the researcher created a specific voice message that provided instructions (requesting name, contact information, and best time to return phone call) for those who called inquiring about the study.

The researcher used a variety of outreach techniques such as networking with youth based agencies/organizations, and members of the African American community. Initially an e-mail that included the flier was sent to community members who worked for organizations that served the target population, or to individuals who worked closely with the target population. Fliers were also given to community members to post at their employment, and they were also asked to make announcements regarding the study. This strategy was used to share information regarding the study and inform the community of the need to recruit study participants.

The study was explained to participants using clear and plain language. The assent form was read out loud for participants. The researcher asked questions after the assent form was reviewed in order to assess the participant's understanding of the study and to clarify any questions or concerns. After acknowledgment of understanding, the participant was invited to sign the assent form. The participant was informed that she could withdrawal from the study at any time. The study was approved by the PSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the DHS Child Welfare Research Office.

Data Collection

Individual interviews (see Appendix B for interview guide) and questionnaires were used to explore the research questions. A demographic questionnaire (see Appendix C) was administered that included specific questions regarding age, race/ethnicity, foster care experiences (i.e. length of stay in foster care, amount of time at current placement, number of placements, etc.), and hair care experiences (i.e. type/style of hair, products, and hair care). If the participant had questions regarding the questionnaire, the researcher attempted to clarify and ensure the participant understood the questionnaire. This questionnaire was administered prior to starting the interview. The entire session was audiotaped. Interviews were conducted in a location that was most convenient for participants, such as in the home, library, or at the mall. The interview began by asking the participant to engage in an experiential activity. All, but one of the participants declined to participate in the activity. The activity asked the participant to create a collage using photos and word clippings from magazines. A variety of magazines, paper, scissors, markers, and a glue stick will be provided, and the participant was asked to use the clippings to describe herself and her hair. The participant was informed that the collage would help to create a visual representation of her thoughts, ideas, beliefs, and perceptions regarding hair. The purpose of this activity was to serve as an introduction to the topics of hair and hair care (which can be a very sensitive topic for African Americans). The researcher allowed the participant to complete the collage without asking any questions, unless a question was posed by the participant. This approach was

used to minimize any influence on the youth's perceptions/values and any disruption to the flow of the activity. The researcher asked the participant to discuss the collage and what it meant to the participant (i.e. why the participant selected the photos/words, what the collage says about the participants' thoughts of her own hair, etc.). Following the discussion regarding the collage, the researcher transitioned to the interview.

The researcher transitioned into the semi structured interview; using questions developed in the interview guide. The interview followed the participant's lead, driving the direction of the interview. The interview guide included specific questions regarding identity, ethnicity, hair, socialization, and foster care, and allowed for follow up questions based on each participant's responses. The interview was audio taped and permission to record was obtained from each participant.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data was analyzed based on the methodology of grounded theory. This methodology assisted the researcher in analyzing the lived experiences of African American female adolescents in foster care. Through grounded theory, the researcher attempted to unearth a theory that would explain the relationship between hair/hair care and its influence on self-concept and self-esteem among African American female adolescents in foster care. Using grounded theory, facilitated the researcher's understanding of the varied experiences of African American female adolescents in foster care, based on factors such as socialization messages, placement, connection to biological family, community, culture, and other important factors that emerged through the process

of data analysis. The participants were encouraged to tell their story regarding their hair/hair care experiences and how these experiences were impacted by their involvement with the child welfare system. Participants were provided the opportunity to reflect on how these hair/hair care experiences might influence their sense of self, self-esteem, or discuss whether they believed there was an association between these concepts. The formulation of theory was instrumental in providing an understanding of hair/hair care and its impact on sense of self and self-esteem among African American female adolescents in foster care. It was instrumental in helping to develop standards of practice and policy within the child welfare system.

Techniques developed by Strauss and Corbin (1998) were used to analyze the data. Open coding was used to identify as many categories as possible, then related categories were grouped by themes. Each interview was transcribed and analyzed individually for specific information, then the categories were compared to assess similarities pertaining to specific phenomena and grouped based on similarities. The researcher also made notation of participants' affect and non-verbal body language during the interviews. Memos and journals were used to assist the researcher in capturing the researcher's responses and reactions to the information. The journal was used to track general themes that emerged during each interview. Memos helped with identifying shifts in the data or content, and noting relationships between categories. As the questions developed in the interview guide moved from general to specific, the next level of

analysis occurred. This included reviewing the initial categories that emerged through open coding and linking them to subcategories that were related.

The final stage of data analysis included selective coding, which consisted of validating the relationship between main categories and integrating the empirical data to help construct a theory. The researcher also ensured saturation of the data occurred and that no new information, categories, or themes emerged within the study. Member checking was utilized to ensure accuracy of participants' experiences. Participants' quotes that highlighted various themes were used to illustrate the data and structure the presentation of qualitative findings.

Pilot Test

A pilot study was conducted to make sure the assent form and interview questions were understandable; to examine whether the interview questions would lead participants to answer the research questions as intended; to test the experiential activity for feasibility and effectiveness; and to gain participant's feedback about the process. Pilot test findings were used to make necessary revisions to the assent and interview protocols and interview questions. The interview process and questions were piloted with 3 African American adolescents/young adults, who were known to the researcher and willing to participate. The first pilot participant was a 15 year old female without any experience in foster care, the second pilot participant was a 13 year old female who was currently in foster care, and the last pilot participant was a 21 year old female with prior experience in foster care. Only one of the participants was representative of the targeted sample,

however it was beneficial to gain feedback from a variety of sources, including a female who had exited foster care and could reflect on interview questions that would most effectively facilitate discussion with a younger youth in care. The participants were asked to reflect on their hair/hair care experiences as an African American female. The entire study protocol was piloted, but specific focus was given to reviewing the assent form, a selection of questions contained in the interview guide, and the experiential activity. Prior to beginning the pilot, the researcher explained to participants that their feedback was important for improving the study. Pilot participants were informed that they would be asked questions about the process and invited to provide feedback. The researcher asked pilot participants to provide feedback regarding their understanding of the study as described in the assent, their understanding of selected questions, including whether the questions are clear and understandable, and whether the experiential activity was effective. The researcher incorporated feedback from the pilot study to make revisions to the study procedures prior to obtaining IRB approval and beginning the actual study. Data gathered from pilot study participants were not incorporated within the study findings.

Pilot participants were asked for permission to record the interview for the purposes of critiquing the researcher's process of conducting the interview, sequence of interview questions, and revising any question that appeared confusing or needed clarification. Pilot participants were asked to choose a location to conduct the interview that was most comfortable for them. One interview occurred at a pizza shop near the

participant's home and the other two interviews occurred in the home. The interview included selected questions from the interview guide. The entire process took an hour to 90 minutes, with the longer interview consisting of review of assent, MEIM measure, experiential activity, and interview.

Overall, each participant reported enjoying the opportunity to be able to talk about her hair and hair care experiences. The interview questions seemed to elicit answers that addressed the research questions. None of the participants reported feeling uncomfortable with any of the questions. However, the young adult provided feedback that adolescent participants may not be as forthcoming about questions that asked them to discuss negative remarks, feedback, or experiences regarding hair. All the participants reported hair was important and noted they did not have a lot of conversations about hair and wished they had opportunities to talk about hair more often. Both of the adolescents reported they liked the experiential activity. The researcher observed the collage to be a visual representation of the participant's perception of hair based on participant's responses to interview questions. Participants with experience with foster care reported they never had a conversation with their caseworker regarding hair or hair care needs.

Chapter IV: Results

Participants Profiles

There were a total of 11 participants, ranging in age from 13-17. Placement types included relative, non-relative, and adoptive. At the time of the interviews, participants reported being in foster care from one to 17 years, ranging from one to 14 placements. Participants described their hair texture as thick, soft, nappy, and curly. All participants reported having contact with biological family members including parents, grandparents, siblings, and extended family members. Some had frequent contact, including regular visits, while some had limited contact via telephone. Most of the participants reported being involved in activities such as gymnastics, basketball, dance, and cheerleading. They also noted involvement with church and/or community based activities such as Delta Gems, Self-Enhancement Incorporated (SEI), Black student union, and girl scouts. The following paragraphs provide a general description of each participant.

Participant 1 was 13 years old and in the 8th grade. She had been in foster care for about a year and had four placements, including a group home. At the time of our interview, she had been in a non-relative foster home for three months, with regular contact with family members that include supervised and unsupervised visits. She described her hair texture as really curly.

Participant 2 was 17 years old and in the 12th grade. She had been in foster care for 15 years, including seven placements. At the time of our interview, she had been in

the same non-relative foster home for 11 years, with regular contact with family members that include supervised and unsupervised visits. She described the texture of her hair as thick and curly.

Participant 3 was 15 years old and in the 10th grade. She had been in foster care for four years, including four placements. At the time of our interview, she had been in a kinship placement, with regular contact with her mother. Her prior placements were non-relative placements. She described the texture of her hair as curly and nappy.

Participant 4 was 17 years old and graduated from high school. She had been in foster care for 17 years and had just two placements. At the time of our interview, she had been in a non-relative home for 17 years. She is employed and has contact with family members. She described the texture of her hair as curly and thick.

Participant 5 was 14 years old and in the 9th grade. She had been in foster care for 11 years and had 14 placements. At the time of our interview, she had been in a non-relative home for six months, with regular contact with family members that include unsupervised visits. She described the texture of her hair as soft and curly.

Participant 6 was 16 years old and in the 11th grade. She had been in foster care for 14 years and had two placements. At the time of our interview, she had been in a non-relative home for six months, with recent supervised visits with her mother. She has a sibling who resided in the same home. She maintained contact with her former foster sister. She described the texture of her hair as curly.

Participant 7 was 13 years old and in the 7th grade. She had been in foster care for 10 years, including seven placements. At the time of our interview, she had been in an adoptive home for four years, with unsupervised contact with family members. She has a sibling who resided in the same home. She described the texture of her hair as rough and soft at times.

Participant 8 was 13 years old and in the 8th grade. She had been in foster care for six years and had one placement. At the time of our interview, she had been in a relative home, with contact with her mother. She has siblings who resided in the same home. She described the texture of her hair as soft.

Participant 9 was 13 years old and in the 8th grade. She had been in foster care for six years and had one placement. At the time of our interview, she had been in a relative home, with contact with her mother. She has siblings who resided in the same home. She described the texture of her hair as stiff.

Participant 10 was 15 years old and in the 10th grade. She had been in foster care for six years and had one placement. At the time of our interview, she had been in a relative home, with contact with her mother. She has siblings who resided in the same home. She described the texture of her hair as soft and thick.

Participant 11 was 16 years old and in the 11th grade. She had been in foster care for eight years, including four placements. At the time of our interview, she had been in a

non-relative foster home for 10 months, with supervised contact with family members.

She described the texture of her hair as medium course.

Researcher's Positioning

I am an African American woman born and raised in Portland, OR. I have worked extensively within the African American community in Portland, primarily with youth. I am aware that being an African American woman from the community may provide an “insider” perspective. I used member checking and triangulation of interviews, to ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the data collected. Member checking allowed me to ensure the data gathered contained accurate information. Triangulation allowed me to compare themes related to hair/ hair care and ensure the themes reflected the experiences of African American female adolescents in foster care. In addition I used a journal to document my thoughts and reflections throughout the research process.

Overall, it is my perspective that my position as an African American female researcher was beneficial to this study. Hair and hair care within the African American community is a sensitive topic that people may be reluctant to discuss openly and honestly. During the interview process, I found that all participants were willing to discuss their experiences and seemed comfortable engaging in a conversation about hair. Throughout the process I wore my hair in braids or a natural afro puff. I questioned whether my natural hair and style selection would impact a participant's reaction to me as the researcher, thus affecting the data. I was particularly concerned that participants would be hesitant to discuss their views on natural hair or censor the discussion as a

result of my hair selection. I did not sense that any of the participants censored her discussion as a result of my appearance; for example, each participant spoke candidly about natural, chemically processed, and straightened hair.

Many participants used a variety of cultural terms that only those knowledgeable about Black hair care would be aware of. For example, participants talked about being tender-headed, a term used when one is sensitive to one's hair being combed or braided. The term "bald-headed" also emerged, which is often used when one has little to no hair or as a demeaning/derogatory term. The term "hot mess" also was used, which is a prefix, and in reference to hair, referring to a person with hair that is highly unfavorable or undesirable. Although I had planned to be conscious of the use of cultural terms and attempted to have participants clarify the meaning of terms used during interviews, there were times I did not ask for an explanation of the meaning and made assumptions based on my cultural knowledge and understanding. As an African American female researcher, I gathered the participants also assumed my understanding of cultural terms, as clarification, explanations, and examples were not provided unless asked for. My non-verbal cues, such as head nodding, also possibly conveyed understanding.

I believe my position as an African American female researcher allowed participants to feel like they could relate to me and there was an unspoken level of understanding. Throughout the interview process other sensitive issues arose. Some participants described situations where they experienced racism and addressed the complexity of colorism (light skin/dark skin) within the African American community.

These participants might not have addressed these topics had they not felt comfortable or assumed this researcher would not be able to relate to their experiences based on cultural differences. Their comments also illustrated how these experiences are linked to the topic of hair, and are unique to the African American experience.

Interview Findings

Qualitative data from 11 individual interviews were coded and analyzed to examine each research question. Four major themes emerged from the data: hair care, perceptions of hair and identity as an African American female, societal influences on self-awareness, and influence of the foster care system. The results are organized based on the research questions and thematic categories.

Hair Care

The first research question investigated the hair care experiences of African American female adolescents in foster care. All participants were able to share stories regarding their hair care experiences, which are captured in the theme hair care. This theme explored how participants defined their hair and what they did to care for it. It also addresses participants' perceptions of their hair and unique findings related to hair care. Some categories highlight commonalities and differences among participants when it comes to hair care. These categories include knowledge, reflections on childhood, responsibility, maintenance, manageability, appreciation for uniqueness, and generational differences. These categories are interconnected, as many participants shared that their

knowledge of hair care came from family members and provided examples of this through reflections on childhood. Knowledge influenced many participants to start doing their own hair and become responsible for their hair care. Through this process, participants learned about maintenance and manageability, thus gaining a greater appreciation for their hair. Surprisingly, a few participants discussed different hair care approaches between themselves and their older care providers.

Knowledge. Many participants shared various ways they learned how to care for their hair. Some participants indicated they learned just by doing or observing. Participant 6 stated, “I just kind of learned how to do it, watching my older sisters.” A second participant remarked, “I have a sister, and I played with her hair. Sometimes I braided her hair and stuff like that, that was mostly it. Her hair is softer than mine, which made it easier to play with. She did my hair, too” (participant 11). A third participant shared, “yes, she (grandmother) taught us different hair styles. When she would do my sister's hair, she would have us sit and watch. That is how I knew how to curl mine, and stuff” (participant 9). A fourth participant noted, “through history, and I look at other people's hair, and think, oh, maybe I should try that, or I just come up with some random idea and do it” (participant 7).

Some participants also discussed things they did to their hair that were not healthy and how they implemented new practices after receiving advice from a family member or foster parent. Participant 6 stated, “I can't keep perming or dying it... yeah, because it will fall out. It is always my baby hair around my head that falls out, breaks.” A second

participant remarked, “she (foster parent) taught me a lot of things, like putting oil in your hair and wearing a doo-rag. She doesn't know how to braid, so she just did twisties and put barrettes in it or something” (participant 7). She also shared, “she has taught me not to go in a pool without a cap if I am swimming or something, because it will break off my hair. Don't straighten it, because you will get split ends and your hair will start falling out” (participant 7).

Participant 5 described the progress she has made since her foster parent taught her how to properly care for her hair. She explained, “I feel that I'm getting there. I used to flat iron my hair and put a lot of oils in it to get it really straight, and I was never really taught that that is not the way that it needed to be done. Then when I came here, she (foster parent) told me that is how your hair gets all sticking together and it doesn't flow. Then she taught me to just put a little bit of oil in it and it gets like this. So after she taught me the first few times, I have been doing it.” Participants provided a variety of examples of how they learned about their hair and hair care. Most importantly, they seemed to have insight regarding hair care products and what they needed to do to properly care for their hair. Some participants also recalled early childhood hair care experiences that contributed to their knowledge of hair care.

Reflections on Childhood. Across the interviews some participants reflected on their childhood experiences prior to entering foster care. This included recalling early hair care memories. Some participants discussed specific hairstyles, their reactions to having to get their hair done when they were young, and the amount of time it took. For

example, participant 3 noted, "...when I was younger, I did not want to get my hair done, never. I never used to sit down for her to do my hair." A second participant recalled, "she [mom] tried to do my hair and I wouldn't let her braid it because it would hurt. Her hands are heavy" (participant 2). One commonality among the participants is that these reflections centered on hair care experiences with their biological mothers. Participant 3 expressed how she wished her foster parent would have used a similar approach as her mother when it came to hair care. She shared, "when I was with my mom, she used to make me sit there and get my hair done. I wish she [foster parent] would be at least like her [mother], but she was not at all." She also discussed the length of time it took to get her hair done and how that is the same for her today. She stated, "I used to hide in my closet because I didn't want to get my hair done, but she [mother] would come and get me, and I would have to get my hair done. I would have to sit there, a good hour to get my hair done. That is how long it takes to get this hair done, an hour and 30 minutes. I have timed it." (participant 3).

A few participants talked about braids being a common hairstyle during their early childhood. Participant 11 recalled, "she [mother] did braids. I had two braids on the two sides of my head, and I would have to get it redone every week, or twice a week if it looked bad." For those participants who had a relationship with their biological mothers during early childhood, it appears as though their mothers played a role in shaping their hair care experiences, potentially impacting how they perceive hair care and how they manage their hair. Coupled with knowledge and early memories of their hair care

experiences, many participants shared how they started taking responsibility for their own hair.

Responsibility. Many participants reflected on when they became responsible for caring for their hair. Several participants indicated that by the time they had entered middle school, they were doing their own hair. They also noted that this was typically an agreed upon decision between them and their care provider. For example, participant 4 shared, “it kind of just came on its own, really. She [foster parent] started seeing me do my own hair, and then stopped doing it. I was like, I am getting too old for braids and barrettes and stuff. A lot of kids at my school, when she did do my hair, they would pick on me about grease in my hair. I just decided to start doing my own hair.” A second participant shared “well, it hurt whenever she did my hair, so I think 12 was around the time I started getting in middle school. I wanted to do it myself, so I told her I was going to do it by myself. She was fine with it” (participant 11).

Participant 4 explained how being teased by peers and feeling embarrassed led to her doing her own hair. She shared, “a lot of the kids in my class would be, chicken grease, they would say that I put chicken grease in my hair or it was too oily or something. Then that is when after awhile I just started to do my own hair because of the embarrassment... I just stopped putting oils in my hair. I would just keep my hair -- usually what I would do is wet it and it would be a natural kind of shine for a little bit and then it would eventually dry up and become really poofy or something.”

Many of the participants reported that although they felt responsible for their hair, they also felt supported by their care providers and were able to ask for assistance when needed. Being responsible for their hair seemed to prompt participants to explore different hair styles. Once participants became responsible for their hair, they shared how they learned how to maintain their hair.

Maintenance. Many participants discussed the importance of having the correct hair care products and styling aids to properly care for their hair. Some participants also discussed their typical hair care routine used to maintain healthy hair or a particular hairstyle. Participant 4 emphasized the importance of the appropriate type of brush and how just any type of comb or brush is not suitable. She explained that “we have to use certain things like oils, certain different kinds of shampoos. We can’t just go to the Dollar Tree and get an off-brand in order for our hair to be healthy.” Most participants named grease, oil, and gel as the primary products used for hair care. Other products such as pink lotion, conditioner, and curl activator were mentioned. Participant 4 described having a specific routine for hair care maintenance: “I wash my hair every two weeks, so I have to sit there and find a time for me to take 2 or 3 hours out of the day for me to wash, flat iron, blow dry and sit there and get the back of my hair. I do it all by myself, so it takes awhile for me to do it.” Participant 11 stated, “I take a shower and then I never brush my hair when I am not in the shower. I brush it in the shower and if I am going out to school and stuff, I brush it out in the shower and then I get out of the shower. In the shower I use conditioner and shampoo. Most of the time conditioner, only conditioner. I

don't use shampoo unless I feel my hair is getting extra dirty, maybe once a month. When I get out I blow dry it, and that's it." Other participants noted using specific items such as a doo-rag or a scarf to wrap hair up as a method to preserve hairstyle. For example, participant 6 stated, "the first week, I'll wrap my hair and after that I just stop caring." Most participants conveyed an understanding of the type of products to use and things they need to do to maintain good hair care practices.

Many participants discussed the amount of time that goes into the process of washing, conditioning, and styling hair. Most participants indicated that the process takes a couple hours and mentioned how time can be a factor in how they style their hair. They discussed a range of hairstyles they typically wear from flat iron, bun, ponytail, braids, weave, to a curly natural. Some participants stated they wore certain hairstyles for convenience, while others selected a hairstyle because of the way it looked. Some also mentioned choosing a hairstyle that helped their hair grow. For example, participant 2 noted, "... I can do more with my hair in braids... put them in a bun, twist them, braid it all in one braid." This participant highlighted the importance of versatility when selecting a hairstyle. Some participants discussed the type of hair they desire, such as long, straight, or thin, and how they select a hairstyle to achieve this look. In reference to wearing a weave, participant 6 stated, "I just like the curly hair look, just cute... yeah, that's what I like that the best, to wear it curly." Participant 10 discussed familiarity and individuality, as she selected hairstyles that are not trendy: "yeah, I like to wear my hair in different styles, not like how everyone is wearing their hairstyles nowadays. I just

stick with the hairstyles that I can do and am familiar with.” These participants emphasized maintenance as an important aspect of hair care, and when they could access the proper products, they were able to manipulate and manage their hair.

Manageability. Several participants highlighted that African American girls have different hair textures and described instances where they felt their hair was or was not manageable, and what they did to achieve manageability. Many participants discussed a variety of experiences from selecting hairstyles that are easy to manage to altering their hair to make it more manageable. For example, participant 11 stated, “it was just really simple, and I think that's why I liked it. I didn't have to wake up and do my hair.” Another participant discussed using chemicals to alter the state of her hair for manageability. “Sometimes I want to get a perm because when I shampoo my hair, it is hard to comb out and when a perm is in my hair, it is not hard. But she [grandmother] said, that perm, it makes your hair fall out, so I don't know” (participant 8). Participant 3 also described using perm to achieve manageability. She noted, “if it is not permed, you try to put your hands straight through it, you feel like your hand is going to rip your hair. It is when I take it out of a ponytail, it just automatically go swoosh. I might as well have kept the ponytail.”

The ability to comb one's hair seemed to be a key aspect of manageability. Some participants noted difficulty with not being able to comb their hair. Participant 4 associated this difficulty with feeling scared to comb her hair, as she was afraid of pain. She shared, “it just shrivels up a little bit and is hard to comb, too, because I have really

curly hair and then when I am trying to comb it out, it hurts my head. I don't like pain in my head, it hurts. I'm kind of scared to comb my hair when it is like that, because I'm afraid of the pain, so I end up probably just leaving it like that until I end up flat ironing it again. The flat iron will kind of straighten it out in order for it to be easier for me to comb it out.” Some participants discussed challenges with manageability, but choose to use other methods besides chemicals, including products like olive oil, shampoos, and conditioners.

Manageability appears to be connected to hair texture. All participants used various descriptors to define the texture of their hair. This included: thick, curly, really curly, nappy, soft, rough, stiff, and medium course. It seemed as though how one perceived her hair texture may influence whether she considered her hair manageable. For example, participant 3 stated, “it is curly, like the nappy curls, they shrivel up. I have African hair. My dad is African so it is like African hair. It is nappy, so I have got to have perms. They are good for my hair because my hair is so thick.” Another participant remarked, “I just want some silky hair... I want longer hair and it is thinner. If it is thin you can do more styles and it is soft” (participant 8). Despite challenges participants highlighted as a result of their hair texture, all participants identified unique qualities they appreciated about their hair.

Appreciation for Uniqueness. Most participants were able to articulate something they like about their hair; despite some wishing they had other qualities. They commented on length, texture, and versatility regarding styling. Participant 5 noted, “it is

soft, and I like the color of it, and how it flows in the wind.” A second participant remarked, “I do like that my hair is curly, even [though] it comes with being coarse and hard to brush. I like that, and that is the reason I [haven’t] put relaxer in my hair. I really like my curls. I like that I can make it straight if I want it to. I just think I like it because it can do a lot of things” (participant 11). A third participant noted differences in comparison to hair texture of non African-Americans. “I like that it is thick and different from other people's hair. I like the short style sometimes... because other people like their hair really long and silky, sleek-like, like Caucasian people. I just like my hair” (participant 10). A fourth participant expressed how she embraced a hairstyle not commonly worn. She remarked, “it is an afro and not many people have afros. It is fun to play with when you have nothing to do” (participant 7).

One phenomenon that emerged during discussion of hair attributes was having hair that flows in the wind. There were three participants who emphasized this quality. For example, participant 3 stated, “when it flows with the wind... that is when I have my real hair. That blows with the wind as well...” A second participant explained, “I like that my hair is long enough to flat iron. It is kind of thin once I flat iron it, so it kind of gives me the feeling as if I was Latina or something. Every girl wants that pretty flowing hair and that is how I feel when I flat iron my hair” (participant 4). A third participant noted how she does not like the texture of her hair because it does not flow. She remarked, “sometimes I don't like how it is so thick. In a convertible your hair doesn't flow, like you see in other people. They have fine hair, thin hair... it just slaps you in the

face” (participant 7). All three of the participants who conveyed this sentiment either permed their hair or straightened it with a flat iron. This phenomenon is striking as it could be interpreted that these participants are aspiring to achieve a certain look, one that is not often associated with African American hair.

Many participants expressed being content with their hair, but there were some participants who discussed hair attributes that they did not like or wished were different. This researcher expected more participants to express discontent with their hair, speculating that being in foster care would have a negative impact on the likeness of their hair. Participant 4 discussed her struggle with her hair and water, which impacted her willingness to swim. She stated, “for me, this is the most embarrassing thing to me, is swimming. I don't like getting in water, because when I get up out of the water, my hair is not the same way it was when I went in, like other girls, like white girls and stuff. When I come out, I am a totally different head. I don't like the fact that water is an issue to my hair. It is not an issue, but it kind of changes it.” Swimming is another topic often associated with Black hair care, as it is common for African American women to not partake in swimming for the same reason expressed by participant 4.

Participant 7 stated, “you really don't want my hair. It is not fun to comb out, it hurts when you comb it out. When you comb it out, all you see in the bathroom is baby hairs.” Another participant remarked, “sometimes I don't like the curls because it can get very hard to manage, and I'm not really used to it” (participant 5). Most participants expressed appreciation for their hair and its unique attributes. In addition, some

participants spoke to historical aspects of Black hair care, by discussing generational differences among hairstyles and hair care perspectives.

Generational Differences. Participants' discussions of generational differences were an unexpected finding. Black hair culture is constantly changing and adolescents are often focused on current hairstyles that are trendy. Some participants who lived with their grandmother or in a foster home with an older foster parent described challenges in negotiating their hair care management. For example participant 5 shared, "my grandma always used oils and grease. Even now she still does, and now when she tried to do my hair, I am, no, I don't like people doing my hair." Another participant explained the challenge of receiving hair care advice from her older foster parent. She shared, "now she [foster parent] is older, she is 62, and she gets just basically curls in her hair, an older woman hair style... now if I ask her advice on hair, she would kind of give me something that she felt was nice in her time. I am older now and also my generation is totally different from her generation. I don't like what she chooses for me... she tells me that I should get little curls or something, and I don't want those curls. She might tell me to go with a natural 'fro or something, and I don't want a natural 'fro... she is giving older advice about how it would be in her time. There are just certain things that I don't ask for her help" (participant 4).

On the other hand, participant 10 talked about being inspired by how her grandmother styled her hair and wanting to achieve the same look. She noted, "...because other African Americans from back in the day, I see how they be having their hair. They

have the little curly hairstyles, and use hot combs and stuff to curl it. That's what I do sometimes and my grandma does to my hair, so I'll look like an intelligent person.”

Religion and Hair. The influence of religion was discussed by some participants. They shared their hair care traditions and practices related to their involvement with religious activities. For example, participant 10 discussed a tradition in her home of prepping hair on Saturday for church service on Sunday. She shared, “some days when we are getting ready for church, she [grandmother] will get the hot comb and straighten it and put some little curls in there. When we wake up for church, I can comb them out and style it.” Another participant shared her frustration with a hairstyle she tried for Easter, but did not like the hairstyle, and how much that made her “mad,” highlighting the importance of achieving a desired look for a special occasion such as Easter. These findings suggest there is a link between religion/spirituality and hair. More importantly, they confirm the importance of looking presentable, especially when engaging in certain religious/spiritual activities.

Overall, participants seemed to have a solid understanding of hair care and the knowledge and skills necessary to care for their hair. They also appeared cognizant of variability with African American hair. These experiences shaped how participants viewed hair and its relationship to how they viewed themselves as African American females.

Perceptions of Hair and Identity as an African American Female

The value of hair as a representation of one's identity was evident across interviews, and speaks to the research question of whether hair is important. The data support the notion that hair influences how African American female adolescents in foster care view their identity and self-esteem. This theme highlights various thoughts on how hair may impact how participants view themselves, which was expressed through the categories of importance, appearance, and self-esteem. Throughout the data, participants illustrated the importance of hair. For example, many participants accepted responsibility for their hair by utilizing knowledge gained to properly care for their hair. They also emphasized the importance by noting how instrumental hair is to their appearance. Many participants discussed appreciation for their hair, which they linked to their overall appearance. Participants also connected their appearance to how they feel about themselves. Those who value their hair, their look, and how they feel about themselves, ultimately hold a positive view of one's self.

Importance. All participants reported their hair was important and some provided explanations as to why it was important. They noted the connection between hair and self-representation. Many participants emphasized hair being a reflection of oneself or one's identity. Participant 7 remarked, "I think hair is important because there are so many reasons, it brings out who you are. It is fun to do things with your hair, like braids or just letting it out naturally. If I didn't have hair, I probably would wear a wig or something. I don't think you could go without hair." A second participant stated, "yes, it is important because it just shapes who I am... it makes me feel more confident and more

girly” (participant 2). A third participant shared, “I feel for people in general, but for African Americans, it is kind of more [important], because our hair is thicker and takes a little bit more time for us to kind of calm it down, put in a ponytail and slick it back rather than white people and Hispanics, so a little bit more” (participant 4).

Some participants discussed the importance of hair care and the risk of losing it if not properly done. For example, participant 9 exclaimed, “I don't want to be bald. I could put it in a couple more styles if it was longer. Yes, it is important because you can lose it.” A second participant noted, “it [hair] should just be taken care of, or else you won't have any hair... just go out with your hair being all messed up and stuff, looking like you haven't done anything to it in years” (participant 10). These participants noted how hair takes on a greater meaning for African Americans, not only is hair viewed as important, to some degree it can shape who you are and how you view yourself.

Appearance. Many participants were very candid about discussing the importance of physical appearance and overall image; looking presentable and feeling comfortable with how one looks were highlighted. For example, participant 4 explained, “I feel like your hair and your face, not even really your face, but your hair kind of fits your image. If your hair is a mess people are probably going to think you are a mess. I try to keep my hair up, if I don't keep up how I look, like clothing-wise, because it is a part of your face, basically. I feel like it is very important to keep your hair up.” A few participants emphasized hair as a representation of themselves and a reflection of their personas. Participant 6 remarked, “I don't know, you can tell a lot by somebody's hair. If

it is matted up, they have had a rough day or something. Usually the way I wear my hair -- if I wear my hair in a messy bun or something, it is because I didn't feel like doing anything, feeling lazy. It kind of projects on me personally.” A second participant stated, “yes, if I come out and my hair is not looking the way I want it to be, I don't feel comfortable. I just don't feel comfortable. It is like having a piece of food on your face and no one tells you. It is kind of embarrassing, and you don't even know it. Me, personally, and I don't know if this just me, over thinking, but if I know something is not right on me, I feel like everyone is looking at me” (participant 4). A third participant remarked, “my parents always tell me that how I walk out of the house is how I am representing them. If they let me walk out of the house any way, then that shows that they are caring and, I don't know how to say it, but where their responsibility lies towards me” (participant 5). These participants conveyed the importance of looking presentable, and that looking “a mess” could be a reflection of how one feels about oneself.

Participant 4 gave an example of how physical appearance could impact other areas of one's life. She noted, “I feel like image is basically a first glance of who you are. If I was to look at someone and their hair was nice, and say I was hiring them, I would think, she looks nice, she looks presentable, compared to someone who comes in with their hair sticking up... I would think different of them. I know it is harder for some people to kind of tame their hair, because everyone is different. But I feel, for me, probably just for me, it is an image thing. I would rather have my clothes look -- I would rather look personally in my clothes just off, but my hair looking good.” This participant

alluded to hair potentially being the first thing someone notices at first glance. A second participant gave an example of not only being concerned about her appearance, but also the appearance of a peer. She stated, “well, one of my friends, she came over to my house -- she lived in Vancouver, and I live in Northeast Portland. She just came to my house one day and asked me if she could spend the night, or whatever, because we were going to go to the last Thursday together. She came over and I saw that her hair wasn't done. I was like, ‘you want to use my comb and brush so you can do your hair’, and I just let her use it. I let her have it because she didn't have a comb or brush to do her hair with” (participant 10).

Participant 4 attributed her change in appearance as the reason she received more boy attention. She explained, “when I started to do my own hair, I think I got more boy attention... I like it, because I've always been the type of person that I don't really get a lot of attention from guys... I didn't feel like no one liked me before... Because no boys wanted to talk to me ever, or say I was with my friend and I thought they were cute, they would end trying to talk to my friend. I didn't think that anybody was attracted to me.”

Participant 11 asserted that appearance and how one's hair looked may be more important for African Americans because there is more effort that goes into caring for hair. She explained, “yeah, I think it just shows what kind of person you are. To me, if you have crazy, frizzy hair, that is just nappy --I don't think it matters to white people. They can just wear it down and it looks all the same. I think with black people it is different, because you have to try harder for your hair. I feel if you don't try and make

your hair look good, it looks like you don't care about yourself.” This suggests an overlay of self-care, as participants surmised that when one failed to properly care for their hair, this implied one did not care about oneself.

One topic that is common within African American culture and is often a sensitive subject to discuss is colorism. Colorism is the difference between skin complexion, categorized as light and dark skinned, where those with lighter skin receive better treatment than those with darker skin. A few participants discussed this issue in association with hair. Participant 3 remarked, “... or the only thing they could say is I am prettier. Because they are light skinned... they say light skin is prettier. I said, I guess you can say that, call it how you see it. I could care less... they will be like, you are too dark and I'm light. I am, ok, that's fine. They think light skins have better hair, because they are light. You know how light skins have long hair. I was like, no, some light skins have no hair and dark skin has better hair, I think, than light skins.” A second participant stated, “because I just can't, it is something I can't do. It is more, I don't know, I guess my family has a lot of impact on it. Because I am so light skinned, they don't think I'm acting black enough. That is just ignorance.” In reference to wearing natural hair (participant 6). These participants illustrated connection between hair and identity in terms of how they viewed themselves. Those views also influenced how they felt about themselves and whether their images were positive or negative.

Self-esteem. Perceptions around self-esteem were also revealed in participant's reflections about themselves in relation to their hair. They noted that there are many

factors that influenced their esteem and it can vary from day to day. Some participants shared a wide range of feelings connected to hair and sense of self. They discussed how other factors, such as being in foster care or not being able to achieve a desired look may influence how they felt about their hair and themselves. Many participants expressed how they felt about themselves depending on how their hair looked and how hair is intrinsic to their being. Participant 3 remarked, “because I wouldn't be myself without my hair, I think.” A second participant stated, “when my hair looks nice, I feel pretty, and try to figure out an outfit to go with how my hair looks” (participant 5). A third participant noted, “I feel pretty. I feel my best right when I get my hair done, a new weave or something” (participant 6). A fourth participant explained how one's hair is connected to feeling confident. She shared, “I feel like when my hair looks good, I don't really worry about it. I feel more confidence if my hair looks good. It is like when you find a new lipstick you have more confidence, or new hair” (participant 11). These participants denoted the positive influence hair can have on their sense of self when they achieve a desired look.

Participants conveyed variability in describing how their hair and feelings toward self are related. For example, participant 4 described, “when I do wear my regular hair, I don't feel as pretty as I would if I had a weave, a straight weave. I feel like a different person, kind of. I am still the same person, but I feel different with the weave. It is not really my hair, but it is close to what other people like, other than my real hair.” A second participant stated, “yeah, when I don't have my hair done, I feel like . . . ugly” (participant

6). A 13 year old young girl described vacillating between feeling “clean” or “filthy/dirty” based on whether or not her hair was done. Another participant remarked, “yes, because when my hair isn't done, I don't feel right, and that something should be done to it... I feel like I am missing something” (participant 10). Participant 6 described how she had been wearing her hair in a messy bun lately. She recently moved from a foster home she had been in for years out of state and returned to Oregon. She expressed how stressful things had been. She shared, “it is usually because just being in foster care is stressful, so I have school and all that, and have to get up early, so usually when I am just really tired or stressed out.”

The experiences participants shared demonstrated that there is a connection between hair and self-perception. Many participants incorporated hair into their identity and sense of self. Overall, hair was not considered a separate element. Participants emphasized the importance of appearance, which was viewed as being influenced by several factors, including how one is perceived in society.

Societal Influences on Self-Awareness

Many participants shared that the hair care messages they received from family members, peers, and society in general influenced how they viewed African American hair. Their descriptions provided validation that racial socialization plays a role in influencing African American female adolescents' perception of hair/hair care. The influence of other people's views and society in general, on participants' perceptions of hair was evident throughout the interviews. This theme was revealed through the

categories of media, cultural differences, and other people's perceptions. Participants identified the media as being an influential factor in how they received information regarding hair care and how they perceived Black hair. Through the media, various beauty messages are conveyed, which often do not include images of African American women. Ultimately, these messages and images have the potential to shape participants' views of appearance, self-esteem, and how they come to appreciate the uniqueness of their hair. In addition, the media is one avenue participants used to make comparisons regarding hair and cultural differences. In turn, these cultural differences also impact how others view Black hair, and contribute to the messages participants receive from others regarding hair.

Media. Many participants shared their views on the portrayal of African American women in the media (television, magazine, and social media). They discussed commonalities regarding what is displayed, for example participant 4 explained, "I see a lot of women, African American girls nowadays, like the weave, or straight weave. Some of them are different and get a curly weave, but something close to African American roots, but most girls with straight hair, Brazilian hair or something" (12). Another participant recalled, "mainly what I see in commercials, they always talk about there are certain products that they use, and they never show African American women. They always show white women, and I don't like the fact that they do that, because they make it seem like their product that they are trying to sell is only for that type of hair... It is just a stereotype" (participant 5). Some participants highlighted how there seemed to be

a preference for long, straight hair and how this is not common for African American hair. Participant 4 shared, “I feel that is what people want to see. I think people think nowadays that is beautiful, other than curly hair; they are, oh, her hair is nappy or something else. Where if the hair is straight, they are, she has beautiful hair.” Another participant stated, “I don't think a lot of African American women want to wear their hair normal... to me it seems like more African American people's hair is really short and sometimes African Americans want their hair long or braided or stuff like that” (participant 7).

Participant 4 detailed her experience with purchasing a product showcased on television and how it did not work well for her hair. She stated, “...I've tried to go out to K-Mart and get this flat iron, where it rolls your hair and flat irons it at the same time as a brush and it rolls. It doesn't work for black girls. That is not for black girls. We need a flat iron that is a black company or refers it for us, not what we see on TV.”

Participant 11 discussed how she observed the promotion of natural hair for African American women in social media. She stated, “I was looking at You Tube things, and there was something about how to do the natural process and how to do your hair naturally, I was thinking, don't people already know that. Then I thought about it, and they probably don't, because they have weaves and stuff so it is harder to take care of your hair.” She also highlighted how there is more awareness of natural hair. She shared, “well, I feel like people are trying to bring the pride of having your hair natural, which I think is really cool” (participant 11). In addition to her observations on social media, she

described an ad she saw in a magazine that displayed an image of a dark skin African woman and how this had a positive influence on her decision to wear an afro. She noted, “well, I don't really know. I think when I started reading up about hair; I started seeing different hair styles and stuff. In *Essence* or maybe another magazine, they had this black girl with red lipstick and she was black, black, like Sudan black, and she had an afro and looked so beautiful. I think that was why, but besides that, I don't really know. I just started doing the bigger, with the blow dryer a couple of months ago. I used to always wear it like that” (participant 11).

In addition to detailing what they saw in the media, a few participants discussed their interpretation of what these images meant. For example, one participant stated, “hair like white people, straight... society thinks it is prettier” (participant 6). She also noted, “I don't know I feel like a lot of people, African American women are ashamed of their hair and that is why they wear weaves. They don't really embrace their natural look” (participant 6). A second participant discussed how women desire hair different than their own. She remarked, “yeah, I do think so. I think that people want curly hair, either curly hair or straight hair, and it is kind of like the grass is greener on the other side thing, where if you have straight hair, you want curly hair. If you have curly hair, you want straight hair. I would love straight hair, but it is not my hair style and I don't want to take the time to do it” (participant 11). In addition to their observations of images of African American women's hair in the media, participants noticed cultural differences with hair among other women.

Cultural Differences. Some participants highlighted noticeable differences among African American hair and hair of those of other ethnicities. They emphasized versatility with African American hair such as hair texture and hairstyles. Participant 9 stated, “just, well, our hair can be nappy. Caucasian people, their hair doesn't really get nappy that much. But they have silky hair. They don't have black people's hair, but I still like our hair. They can't do black people hair styles.” Another participant noted, “yeah, the black people have the worst hair and white people have good hair. Mexicans have good hair because it grows longer than ours” (participant 3). Participant 10 explained, “it is different from them, because some African Americans have some of their hair is hard to comb out. It is nappy in the roots and the edges are, just not straight. Other ethnicity's hair is like slick, and curly, like they don't really have to do anything with their hair, but brush it.” A third participant remarked, “it takes more time to do our hair and to figure out what we want. It is kind of hard to do certain styles with our hair. For me, I want to do certain styles with my hair that I can't do with my hair because I don't have that type of hair or my hair is not long enough. We kind of have to do what we can, really” (participant 4).

Participant 5 provided a detailed example of her observations of cultural differences. She exclaimed, “that's why I really don't like, when I see African American kids adopted... it is like we know what we can and can't do to our hair, and they are so used to what they use, and the products that they use in their hair and what they do, that their children, or the children they adopted or are taking care of, their African American

hair is different from Caucasian hair. How they do their hair versus how we do our hair is a totally different concept. I just feel that the way that they do their hair is totally different.” These participants demonstrated an understanding of African American hair and its unique qualities, and how they differed from hair of women of other ethnicities. This example also speaks to the power of other people’s perceptions and how these perceptions influence hair.

Other People’s Perceptions. Most participants reported awareness of how other people perceived their hair, or commented on how African American hair is perceived in general. They primarily noted compliments they received about their hair. Some participants reported assumptions made based on factors such as texture and length. For example, participant 4 stated, “yeah, people say I have pretty straight hair, that is because it is flat ironed, but most of the time, if I was going to get compliments on my hair, it would be because of my hair color, because I always change my hair color.” A second participant noted, “when I wear curly weaves, people like my hair better... just that it looks prettier. I guess just because, I don't know, anything new is prettier. My foster mom -- she likes my curly hair better than when I get it straight” (participant 6).

Participant 5 discussed how people made assumptions about her hair based on her nationality. She shared, “well, one of my friends is, you have black people hair, and I was, okay. I don't know how to explain it. She is more of the type that I have good hair type of person, and I am just the kind of person that my hair is how it is. I just have to deal with it. She is just, you are not mixed, because you don't have hair like me, and if

you were mixed, you would have hair like me. I was, necessarily the way my hair is doesn't mean if I am mixed or not. It doesn't depend on my nationality.” Similarly, a second participant reported how members of her foster family made remarks regarding her hair based on her nationality. She stated, “...I am really the only mixed person in my family and also in my house right now. They always think that I can do certain things to my hair and it will be okay, but it is still kind of hard” (participant 4).

The term “good hair” arose during the interviews. This term is used within African American culture to denote hair that is similar to European hair. This researcher expected to hear this term throughout the interviews, but it was only discussed among a few participants. Although the term was not frequently used, there were several references made to European like hair in the interviews. Participant 11 remarked, “I think good hair is white hair, the less coarse it is, the better it is.” Another participant acknowledged hearing the term, but not knowing what it meant. She stated, “my grandma and my mom say I have good hair, but I don't know what they mean by that... that is doesn't fall out a lot, that it is long” (participant 8).

Some participants discussed peer influence. Participant 5 explained, “I was getting older and noticing that none of the girls that I hung around did their hair like mine. I started getting scared because they would say the more you put your hair in buns, the center of your hair breaks off because you put it in buns. I would sleep with it in a bun and not let it out. So I wanted my hair to grow back, so I am going to wear it down.” Another participant remarked, “every black girl I know my age wears weaves. I don't

know anybody that wears their natural hair... I haven't been to school out here, but everybody I know in Arizona wears weaves, and all the girls out here that I have met so far wear weaves. It is just weave, weave, weave" (participant 6). Participants seemed to be very aware of what others had to say about their hair and what they saw around them, which suggest the messages they received and their environment could potentially influence their hair choices. Many participants also shared how being in foster care impacted their hair care experiences.

Influence of the Foster Care System

In addition to typical sources of influence, the participants in this study expressed the impact of living in foster care on their hair and hair care perceptions and experiences. A few participants highlighted how relationships with their foster parent improved their hair care knowledge and influenced how they cared for their hair. Some participants noted that their foster parent did hair out of the home and one participant stated her foster parent is a licensed beautician. This is one aspect of foster care that participants reported as being beneficial. However, in contrast to these positive influences, most participants recalled negative influences of being in foster care on their hair and hair care. Some participants discussed challenges they experienced with getting their hair done, while others addressed how lack of knowledge regarding Black hair had a significant impact. Participants reported these challenges occurred throughout their childhood, and varied depending on length of placement and multiple placements.

Some participants recalled vivid memories of their early childhood and how they felt about their hair. Participant 7 explained how she did not take pictures of herself when she moved to a new foster home because she did not like how she looked in the photos. She stated, “yeah, I do (referring to photos), it is at my old foster mom's house, a school picture and it looked horrible. It made my whole entire smile look crooked because my hair was not even combed out. Yet, everybody still loved my hair.”

Participant 2 reflected on her experience being in a foster home where the foster parents were not knowledgeable about caring for her hair. She shared, “I used to have barrettes over all my head until I came here... they just would stick it up in the barrettes and let it stay there until it would get stuck to my head... it was hard to take them out and would be hard to comb out... it would hurt. And my hair wouldn't comb out and getting brushed... they would just use some stuff, like white stuff, and just use a soft brush to put it in.” A second participant remarked, “most of them were Caucasian, so they weren't quite sure what to do with my hair, because it was nappy and really short. I didn't [inaudible] my hair, because I wasn't quite sure what to do with it. My hair wasn't that strong, it is pretty weak, so they just pulled it and strands of hair would just fall out” (participant 7). A third participant stated, “...like how sew-in's work. She bought sew-ins for sewing into a scalp... yeah, she doesn't know the difference between braiding hair and sewing hair... she doesn't even ask questions anymore. She just gives me money.” (participant 6). Participant 4 shared her observations of friends who did not have support in getting their hair care needs met. She explained, “yeah, I've had a lot of friends who

have been in foster care, and really their hair -- they don't know what to do with their hair themselves, because they haven't had someone to actually help them with it. Their foster parents don't know what to do, either.”

Participant 5 discussed how she believed money played a major role in the lack of hair care she received in former foster homes. She described, “the whole hair braiding thing. Other than the foster placement that I am in now, my previous foster home was very, I don't know, honestly I never had really good hair care there, because she wouldn't get me the things that I needed. When it came time for me to do my hair, I had to ask my mother to send me the money to get it done.” She also exclaimed, “I just feel that the money she got for me to take care of me and get me the necessities that I needed, was more so on what she wanted to spend it on, more on her than on the other children in the house... even then, when I wanted to get it braided, I had to ask my mother to send me the money and have my sister do it.” This researcher assumed there would be more discussion of experiences of lack of access and money being a barrier to hair care. However, most participants shared that their care providers covered the cost of hair care, and for the most part were able to get their hair care needs met.

Participant 1 described her experience of being in a group home and not having access to hair care products. She stated, “I was used to having them available to me, so I guess it was just like shock or something.” She also described how getting her hair done was used as a reward while living in a group home. She noted how she earned a trip to the beauty shop to get her hair done. She also reported she selected to go to the beauty

shop as her reward. As a result of these unfavorable experiences, some participants provided recommendations for what the foster care system could do differently to improve the hair care experiences of African American children in foster care.

Improving Foster Care System Support for Hair and Hair Care. Some participants discussed their experiences with caseworkers and provided specific recommendations for improvement. Most participants reported not having any conversations with caseworkers regarding their hair care needs. Some stated they rarely had any contact with their caseworkers. Many participants noted that taking care of their hair care needs were the responsibility of their care providers. Participant 4 stated, “to be honest, I don't remember any of them helping me with my hair. Me and my foster mom have always taken care of my hair. If it wasn't her or it wasn't me, it wasn't them.” She also mentioned race and lack of knowledge regarding hair care as factors in not talking with her caseworker regarding hair. She reported, “no, she is white. She doesn't even know. I feel like I don't try to complain too much. I am the type of person that if I feel something, I try to fix it myself. I don't like to complain too much about things” (participant 4). Another participant talked about a caseworker's attempt to be helpful and reported “no, she actually sent me to this one thing, and I was like, I'm not going there and let them touch my hair... it was a Dress for Freedom thing, and you get a dress and do your hair and make you look all pretty. I was like; I am not letting them mess up my hair” (participant 5).

Most participants provided recommendations for what the foster care system could do to ensure African Americans female adolescents in foster care received proper hair care. Many of the recommendations focused on the importance of having foster parents who are knowledgeable about African American hair and placing African American children with African American foster parents. Participant 2 stated “they should just place them where someone can do hair and care for their hair... African Americans that know how to do hair... because they know about their race's hair.” Another participant highlighted the importance of feeling comfortable asking for what she needed. She shared, “actually, sometimes I just wouldn't ask for stuff from the foster mom and would just have my mom get it, because I knew she would know what to get. I could have asked them at any time” (participant 11).

Some participants emphasized the importance of knowing about different hair textures for African Americans, which may impact the type of hair products needed. Participant 1 explained, “not all girls have the same type of hair... some people have really curly hair and some have wavy hair, and some have super-super curly hair. So we don't always use the same products.” A second participant noted, “they need different hair care than others, like you say. Everybody's hair texture is different and some need different attention than others. Some need braids more often to help it grow and get to the point where it needs to be taken care of. Some just need to learn how to do their hair” (participant 5).

Many participants made specific suggestions such as having a class to learn how to care for African American hair, utilizing salons, and asking others for advice. Participant 5 remarked, “take an interest in it, actually take an interest, get appointments at hair salons. You don't have to get an appointment to just get it done, but see what they need for their hair. You can walk into any salon and say, is there anything I need for my type of hair. There are a lot of people out there that can help you.” A second participant stated, “if they have any African American friends and they get their hair done, you should probably ask them where you get your hair done, or do you do hair” (participant 7).

Participant 4 provided a detailed example of her observations. She shared, “I feel if you have a foster child that is not your race or you are a different race from your foster child, you could help them by going online, looking up -- for a foster parent just alone, they have a black girl or black boy, they should go online and figure out, look around see how black people's hair is, and maybe even talk to some black people and ask them what they should do, that they have a foster child that is African American and they want to help them out but don't really know what to do. Some people would be, oh, you can bring them in here. It's their choice, they could bring them in a shop, or they could actually figure out ways that they could help to do their hair. Or go to your foster child and ask them how do they think is the best way to take care of their hair, and what are some ways they can help them to take care of their hair and just be a support system.” Some participants also discussed the importance of directly asking a foster child about

their hair care needs. This could be a conversation a caseworker has prior to placement or one a foster parent has at the beginning of a placement. Participants seemed to be very clear about what works and what is helpful. They provided practical recommendations that could easily be implemented in the foster care system.

Chapter V: Discussion

This study explored the current hair and hair care perceptions and experiences of African American female adolescents in foster care, specifically examining their attitudes, behaviors, beliefs, and socialization messages regarding hair, and the association of hair and hair care with their identity and self-esteem. The study was conducted to gather a snapshot of their perceptions and experiences, to gain a deeper understanding of which elements are important in addressing hair and hair care, and to identify effective strategies/approaches for supporting hair care needs of these adolescents.

This discussion of findings and implications is organized around the four major themes that emerged from the data: hair care, perception of hair and identity as an African American female, societal influence on self-awareness, and influence of the foster care system. Exploring the topic of hair and hair care evoked comments on racism, colorism, and generational differences within African American culture, reflecting the strong connections of culture and hair. Overall, many of the study's results were consistent with the literature surrounding the role of racial socialization, establishing an ethnic identity, and developing a healthy sense of self and self esteem.

Theme 1: Hair Care

Consistent with the literature, the African American female adolescents in foster care in this study shared similar hair care experiences as reported for African American

adolescents in general (Banks, 2000; Phinney, 1989). They discussed their struggles with coming to terms with their hair, learning how to care for their hair, and taking great pride in their hair. Elaborated upon below, these youth also encountered similar cultural socialization processes in regards to hair and hair care.

One surprising finding was the amount of contact participants reported they had with biological family members. It was expected that adolescents who remained in foster care would have limited to no contact with their biological families, and assumed that most participants would be disconnected from their family. However, to the contrary, many participants reported having consistent relationships with family members. For example, participants shared experiences with bio family members that directly and indirectly contributed to their hair care knowledge. Some participants were told what to do to care for their hair, and others reported they learned through observation. Some participants also received hair care knowledge through connection to other non-related African Americans who were instrumental in sharing information and teaching proper hair care. Although this study did not explore the hair care experiences of care providers, some participants made clear distinctions regarding their hair care interactions with African American providers versus Caucasian providers. Participants seemed to be more comfortable with and receptive of knowledge received from African American care providers. Given the connection many participants had with biological family members, it is assumed that the knowledge passed down was from an African American perspective. Thus, the messages participants received could be multigenerational. Some

participants acknowledged generational differences, suggesting intergenerational knowledge regarding hair and hair care is passed down. This is significant in understanding their frame of reference regarding hair and hair care. It could be implied that embedded in the knowledge are established attitudes, beliefs, and approaches regarding hair and hair care.

These findings speak to the importance of culturally-based community connections in supporting African American female adolescents in developing appropriate hair care practices and routines. In association with this contact, many participants reported benefits of gaining important cultural knowledge and information about hair and hair care from family/community members, suggesting racial socialization played a key role in their acquisition of knowledge (Lesane-Brown, 2006). Clearly, these study participant's interactions helped to shape their value around hair and influenced their attitudes and behaviors regarding hair and hair care. Perhaps maintaining contact with family of origin and community members serves as a protective factor while in foster care, which, is crucial to developing a positive attitude towards hair and hair care.

Theme 2: Perceptions of Hair and Identity as an African American female

Study findings regarding hair's influence on identity and self-esteem were consistent with findings in the literature. Banks (2000) concluded from her study that hair holds value and that there is a relationship between hair and identity. These views were also shared by the current study participants; in some cases; for example, participants consistently shared that hair is a reflection of their identity, shaping who they are.

Further, McAdoo (2002) highlighted the messages African American females receive about appearance and how these messages can shape their awareness of hair texture and skin complexion. Study participants discussed the significance of appearance, which was a category that emerged from the data. Participants also remarked about the amount of time and effort that goes into looking presentable, and how this is of utmost importance. Thus, care providers and others working with African American children should be mindful of the significance of appearance for African American female adolescents and how this plays out on a daily basis. These findings reinforce the importance of taking a holistic approach when considering the well-being of African American children, extending beyond attention to a safe living environment, to factor in culture and provide resources to support young women in developing a healthy sense of self and positive self-esteem.

In regards to development, the older participants communicated a better grasp of the complexity of Black hair and they were able to articulate their experiences and shed light on their understanding of politics associated with hair. This is to be expected as African American females mature and gain more experiences, and they become more capable of interpreting the implications of the politics of Black hair. Thus, there appears to be an intersection of politics and development. As an African American female matures, she may find herself at different stages in her life regarding absorption of, and responsiveness to, other's perceptions and judgments around her hair, approach to her

hair, assessing and reassessing her relationship with her hair and how that relationship shapes how she views herself as an African American female.

Participant's explanations as to why hair is important varied, but ultimately all endorsed its importance. This finding offers insight as to how the importance of hair serves as the foundation for understanding the link to appearance and self-esteem. For example, many participants gave examples of instances in which they did not achieve a desired look and how that impacted whether or not they felt like they looked presentable, how they interpreted how other perceived their appearance, and how they felt overall about themselves. This confirmation of importance also suggests that participants have a sense of pride in how they look, as reflected in findings regarding the need to always look presentable. Turnage (2004) found this similarly strong connection between self-perception and self-esteem. While much of the literature regarding outcomes of children in foster care is dismal, these findings offer promise around the potential for young women to develop and convey pride in identifying as an African American female and highlighted positive aspects of African American women.

Theme 3: Societal Influences on Self-Awareness

The study participants were very cognizant of the influence of media and the messages perpetuated about African American women regarding image. More importantly, they highlighted the lack of African American women and dominance of European women in the media. Okazawa-Rey et al. (1986) discuss how society's view of what is attractive or unattractive for a Black female- profoundly impacts psychosocial

development. African American female adolescents in foster care are not exempt from societal influences such as that conveyed in the media. This impact was evident through the discussion of a few participants who expressed the desire to have hair that flows in the wind, signifying an attribute more consistent with European hair. Poran (2002) reported similar findings among women of color in college who defined beauty that resembled that of the dominant culture's standards of beauty. This finding speaks to the challenges African American females encounter as they evaluate messages they receive about what it means to be an African American female in this society, and how to process these messages as they navigate their quest for ethnic identity.

The media is one factor influencing sense of self; however, the impact of family, peers, and the community seemed to be more influential. Participants commented on the input they received, both solicited and unsolicited, regarding hair and hair care from family and peers and how this input was either beneficial to helping them address their hair care needs, or deemed not helpful to their views on hair/hair care and how one should look. This was evident in a participant's statement about hair growth and suggestions on how to achieve healthy hair, and statements made about hair texture based on nationality and the perception of how one should look. Perhaps African American female adolescents in foster care may be more vulnerable as a result of their circumstances, and more willing to appease people by accepting other people's ideas and perceptions of what it means to be an African American female, thus influencing their hair care choices. This assumption was not directly reflected in the data; however

participants did allude to the pressure of family members and peers regarding hair and hair care decisions.

Participants addressed the complexity of Black hair in America, emphasizing their awareness of the politics surrounding Black hair. This was evident through their discussions of challenges specific to African Americans and hair. They discussed the importance of having care providers who understand Black hair, but more importantly, they indirectly spoke to the need to have a hair care environment that affirms who they are as African American females, is non-judgmental regarding hair care preference (natural or altered), allows them to be comfortable with who they are, and ultimately support their decision in how to care for their hair.

Understanding the politics of Black hair is vital for any care provider for African American female adolescents. In America, African Americans are generally more focused on hair than other cultural groups; in part directly connected to our traumatic history and how hair (specifically hair texture) was used as a way to cause division among African Americans. Today, there is a movement within the African American culture, encouraging African American women to embrace their natural hair and take pride in their hair texture.

Theme 4: Influence of the Foster Care System

The findings were mixed in comparison with other studies suggesting that long-term foster care and multiple placements adversely impact ethnic identity (Kools, 1997;

White et al., 2008). Some participants reported benefits based on placement, with their care providers who were knowledgeable about Black hair care, while other participants reported the negative impact of placement, with their care providers who were not knowledgeable about Black hair care. In regards to the benefits of non-relative placements, participants indicated how helpful it was to have a care provider who was culturally attuned to their hair care needs. Most of the participants had been in foster care long-term, but all reported having contact with family members, suggesting familial contact serves as a buffer and potentially has a positive impact on identity development. Findings from other studies (Kools, 1997; Schwartz, 2007) have addressed the importance of familial connection in promoting healthy sense of self and a positive ethnic identity.

However, many participants recalled challenging experiences they encountered, which collectively appeared to be the result of lack of knowledge regarding Black hair and hair care. Although some participant reported benefits of non-relative placements, this was not the case for all. Other participants shared painful memories of their hair hurting when combed, not liking how they looked in photos, and not being able to experience certain hairstyles (such as braids) due to money. As a result, participants provided a variety of suggestions to improve the experiences of African American female adolescents in foster care surrounding hair care.

Emergent Recommendations for the Foster Care System

There are several emergent recommendations for the foster care system that could be made based on the interview findings. Strong and consistent input was provided by the participants around the importance of hair and hair care, as well as their need for support. Associated recommendations were developed to help address some of these needs and include: 1) Increase caseworkers' awareness of the importance of culture and hair care among African American children in foster care; 2) Ensure that caseworkers and care providers are knowledgeable about Black hair care and hair care products for African American children in foster care; 3) Facilitate the development of partnerships between the foster care system and beauticians/barbers, local beauty salons and barbershops to address the hair care needs of African American children in foster care; and 4) Target funds to pay for the hair care needs of African American children in foster care.

The most glaring concern emerging from the data was related to stories shared by some participants regarding their challenging experiences surrounding hair and hair care while in foster care. Lack of access to hair care products and proper hair care maintenance was reflected in participant's reports of lacking knowledge and inappropriate use of hair care products, which could be detrimental and have an adverse impact on African American female adolescents in foster care. Training should be developed to teach Black hair care to caseworkers and care providers. Through training, they would gain a better understanding of the importance of hair, and learn basic information regarding hair care products and hair care maintenance, and about resources to meet the hair care needs of African American children in foster care. The training

should also address the politics and complexity of Black hair, which are key aspects to understanding Black hair care. For example, it is extremely important for those working with African American female adolescents to understand the role of historic trauma associated with Black hair in America and the impact it continues to have on Black women. Training should also address the importance of caseworkers' awareness of and support for youth in navigating the challenges of multiple societal and other influences. There is an intersection of politics and development, as African American females find themselves at different stages of the developmental continuum when it comes to hair and hair care. Caseworkers should also be advised on how to inquire about the hair care needs of African American children when considering placement options to ensure hair care necessities are addressed. Further, hair could be used as a focal point for connecting youth with their families, and utilizing these relationships to help foster meaningful connections, which, in turn, could help African American female adolescents in foster care obtain valuable information regarding hair and hair care.

African American children are noted because it is important for the foster care system to be aware that the complexity of Black hair is not gender specific. Experience suggests that many African American males in foster care have similar hair care experiences and needs, and they also are susceptible to the problems faced by African American females. Societal views regarding hairstyle selections and preferences among African American males exist, including assumptions made about who they are based on hairstyle selection. For example, African American males who wear locs are often

stereotyped as aggressive, militant, or associated with Black intellect. The foster care system could collaborate with local beauticians/barbers to provide hair care education and services at a special rate for African American children of both genders in foster care. This approach would also potentially increase access to proper hair care services and serve as a resource for caseworkers and care providers who are not knowledgeable about caring for Black hair.

Finally, many participants reported they were responsible for their hair care. They also confirmed that they primarily rely on their care provider to purchase hair care products and pay for hair care services. Caring for African American hair can be expensive and it appears as though providers are not compensated for these expenses. It would be beneficial for the foster care system to explore out of pocket hair care expenses for care providers, and include additional funding for hair care expenses.

Limitations

The purpose of this study was to increase knowledge and inform theory in a new area of study. This study was limited in that it is not able to fully explain the complexity associated with hair among African American female adolescents in foster care. Further, some aspects of hair/hair care unearthed during this study need to be explored through future studies. Another challenge is not being able to include an array of participants based on their current circumstances. For example, it was more challenging to access African American female adolescents placed in residential care, group homes or other settings, as caseworkers did not refer participants in such placement type, and might have

been more inclined to focus on stability rather than explore opportunities to participate in research. Thus, the willingness of adults in charge of the adolescents may have significantly impacted sampling for this study. Finally, this study did not focus on multi-ethnic youth for whom hair and hair care could have different meanings and influences. Taking into account these limitations, this study was nonetheless the first attempt to explore the hair/hair care perceptions and experiences of this population. The qualitative approach proposed focused on building in depth understanding of the meanings and processes related to supporting hair and hair care among African American female adolescents. The study should inform future research focused on larger samples, yielding statistical findings that could be generalized.

Overall the results of this study contributed to the understanding of the significance of hair/ hair care, provided the child welfare system with specific information regarding hair care experiences of African American female adolescents in foster care, and highlighted how messages relating to racial socialization are important in shaping a positive sense of self and healthy identity development. It was my hope that the knowledge gained from this study would lead to an examination of current child welfare practices related to the cultural needs of African American youth. Once the current practices are assessed, implementation of knowledge and recommendations from this study should be used to inform practices that are more conducive to the cultural needs of African American youth in foster care.

The results of this study are limited by several factors, including sampling method. The primary recruitment method was collaborating with DHS. Most of the participants were referred by their caseworkers, and all of the participants were in family placements. Thus, the study relied on the judgment of caseworkers to determine who should be recommended to participate in the study. The study purposefully did not include participants in other placements types such as group homes or residential settings, and was limited to the experiences of African American female adolescents with open cases in Multnomah County. This was an exploratory qualitative study; although statistical generalizability is limited, theoretical generalizability is possible. The intent of this study was to foster deeper understanding of the experiences of African American female adolescents in foster care.

Despite these limitations, findings from this study could serve as the foundation for more extensive research into the area of hair and hair care within the foster care system. Additional studies could be conducted to assess the level of staff, care providers, and community members' understanding of Black hair care, to develop and validate culturally specific training for caseworkers and care providers regarding hair and hair care, and to further analyze important factors associated with the connection of hair to sense of self and self-esteem, considering a larger, more representative sample of the population. Studies that explore the hair and hair care experiences of African American males in foster care are warranted. Building upon this research, a logical next step would

be to develop and evaluate a culturally specific training approach, as participants emphasized the need for care providers to be culturally aware of hair and hair care.

Summary/Conclusion

This qualitative study explored the hair care experiences of African American female adolescents in foster care. The findings produced 4 themes of hair care, perception of hair and identity as an African American female, societal influence on self-awareness, and influence of the foster care system. The theoretical framework underlying the study, racial socialization, proposes that messages both direct and indirect, influence how African American female adolescents in foster care view hair and how hair is linked to identity and self-esteem. Findings from the literature that imply hair is important and is inherently linked to sense of self and self-esteem, were confirmed. Recommendations offered invite caseworkers, care providers, and community partners to increase their knowledge and awareness of hair and hair care, and develop a system that will properly address the hair care needs of African American children in foster care.

This study helps to fill a major research gap and contributes to the body of knowledge surrounding hair and hair care for African American children in foster care. This was the first study to illuminate the hair and hair care perceptions and experiences of African American female adolescents in foster care. Findings highlight areas needing additional research, training, and policy development to ensure African American children receive the support they need to properly address hair and hair care. This area of

research is promising and the ultimate hope is that the findings will lead to significant improvements in the hair care experiences of African American children in foster care.

References

- Anyon, Y. (2011). Reducing racial disparities and disproportionalities in the child welfare system: Policy perspectives about how to serve the best interests of African American youth. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 33, 242-253.
- Banks, I. (2000). *Hair matters: beauty, power, and Black women's consciousness*. New York: New York University Press.
- Barth, R. P. (2005). Child welfare and race: Models of disproportionality. In D.M. Derezotes, J.Poertner, & M. F. Testa (Eds.) *Race matters in child welfare: The overrepresentation of African American children in the system*. Washington, DC: Child Welfare League of America Press.
- Beckett, J. O., & Lee, N. L. (2004). Informing the future of child welfare practices with African American families. In Everett, J. E., Chipungu, S. P., & Leashore, B. R. (Eds.) (2004). *Child welfare revisited: An Africentric perspective*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.
- Billingsley, A., & Giovannoni, J. M. (1972). *Children of the storm: African-American children and American child welfare*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Brody, G. H., Murry, V. M., McNair, L., Yi-Fu, C., Gibbons, F. X., Gerrard, M., & Wills,

- T. A. (2005). Linking changes in parenting to parent-child relationship quality and youth self-control: The strong African American families program. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 15(1), 47-69.
- Byrd, A. D., & Tharps, L. L. (2001). *Hair story: Untangling the roots of black hair in America*. New York: St Martin's Press.
- Caldwell, C. H., Zimmerman, M. A., Bernat, D. H., Sellers, R. M., & Notaro, P. C. (2002). Racial identity, maternal support, and psychological distress among African American adolescents. *Child Development*, 73(4), 1322-1336.
- Carlson, C., Uppal, S., & Prosser, E. C. (2000). Ethnic differences in processes contributing to the self-esteem of early adolescent girls. *The Journal of Early Adolescence*, 20(1), 44-67.
- Chae, D. H., Lincoln, K. D., Jackson, J. S. (2011). Discrimination, attribution, and racial group identification: Implications for psychological distress among black Americans in the national survey of American life (2001-2003). *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 81(4), 498-506.
- Chipungu, S. S., Daughtery, L. G., & Kernman, B. (2009). Developmentally appropriate

community-based responses to the permanency needs of older youth involved in the child welfare system. (291-312). In B. Kerman, M. Freundlich, & A. N. Maluccio (Eds.) *Achieving permanence for older children and youth in foster care*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Clark, K. B., & Clark, M. K. (1940). Skin color as a factor in racial identification of negro preschool children. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 11(1), 159-169.

Clark, K. B., & Clark, M. K. (1947). Racial identification and preference among negro children. In E. L. Hartley (Ed.). *Readings in social psychology*. New York: Holt, Reinhart, and Winston.

Coard, S. I., Breland, A. M., and Raskin, P. (2001). Perceptions of and preferences for skin color, black racial identity, and self-esteem among African Americans. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 31(11), 2256-2274.

Coard, S. I., Foy-Watson, S., Zimmer, C., & Wallace, A. (2007). Considering culturally relevant parenting practices in intervention development and adaptation: A randomized controlled trial of the black parenting strengths and strategies (BPSS) program. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 35(6), 797-820.

Courtney, M. E. (2009). Outcomes for older youth exiting the foster care system in the

united states. (40-74). In B. Kerman, M. Freundlich, & A. N. Maluccio (Eds.) *Achieving permanence for older children and youth in foster care*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Daughtery, L. G. (2011). Understanding identity development and spirituality in African American female adolescents through their foster care experience. *Journal of African American Studies*, 15(4), 455-468.

Derezotes, D. M., & Poertner, J. (2005). Factors contributing to the overrepresentation of African American children in the child welfare system. In D.M. Derezotes, J. Poertner, & M. F. Testa (Eds.) *Race matters in child welfare: The overrepresentation of African American children in the system*. Washington, DC: Child Welfare League of America Press.

Derezotes, D. M., Poertner, J., & Testa, M. F. (Eds.) (2005). *Race matters in child welfare: The overrepresentation of African American children in the system*. Washington, DC: Child Welfare League of America Press.

Detlaff, A. J., & Rycraft, J. R. (2008). Deconstructing disproportionality: Views from multiple Community stakeholders. *Child Welfare*, 87(2), 37-58.

Erikson, E. (1968). *Identity youth and crisis*. New York: W. W Norton & Company.

Everett, J. E., Chipungu, S. P., & Leashore, B. R. (Eds.) (2004). *Child welfare revisited: An Africentric perspective*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.

- Falconer, J. W., & Neville, H. A. (2000). African american college women's body image: An examination of body, mass, african self-consciousness, and skin color satisfaction. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 24, 236-243.
- Gavazzi, S. M., Alford, K. A., & McKenry, P. C. (1996). Culturally specific programs for foster care youth: The sample case of an African American rites of passage program. *Family Relations*, 45(2), 166-174.
- Harris, M. S., & Skyles, A. (2008). Kinship care for African American children: Disproportionate and disadvantageous. *Journal of Family Issues*, 29(8), 1013-1030.
- Hegar, R., & Scannapieco, M. (1995). From family duty to family policy: The evolution of kinship care. *Child Welfare*, 74(1), 200-216.
- Hill, R. B. (2004). Institutional racism in child welfare. In Everett, J. E., Chipungu, S. P., & Leashore, B. R. (Eds.) (2004). *Child welfare revisited: An Africentric perspective*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.
- James, K. A., Phelps, L., & Bross, A. L. (2001). Body dissatisfaction, drive for thinness, and self-esteem, in african american college females. *Psychology in the Schools*, 38(6), 491-496.

- Jimenez, J. (2006). The history of child protection in the African American community: Implications for current child welfare policies. *Child and Youth Services Review*, 28, 888-905.
- Kerman, B., Freundlich, M., & Maluccio, A. N. (Eds.) (2009). *Achieving permanence for older and youth in foster care*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Koh, E., & Testa, M. F. (2011). Children discharged from kin and non-kin foster homes: Do the of foster care re-entry differ? *Children and Youth Services Review*, 33, 1497-1505.
- Kools, S. M. (1997). Adolescent identity development in foster care. *Family Relations*, 46(3), 263-271.
- Kools, S. (1999). Self-protection in adolescents in foster care. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing*, 12(4), 139-152.
- Lesane-Brown, C. L. (2006). A review of race socialization within black families. *Developmental Review*, 26, 400-426.
- McAdoo, H. P. (2002). The village talks: Racial socialization of our children. In H.P. McAdoo (Ed.) *Black children: social, educational, and parental environments 2nd Ed.* California: Sage Publications.

- Murray, C. B., & Mandara, J. (2002). Racial identity development in african American children: Cognitive and experiential antecedents. In H. P. McAdoo (Ed.) *Black children: social, educational, and parental environments 2nd Ed.* California: Sage Publications.
- Ofosu, H. B., Lafreniere, K. D., & Senn, C. Y. (1998). Body image perception among women of african descent: A normative context? *Feminism and Psychology*, 8(3), 303-323.
- Neblett, E. W., Smalls, C. P., Ford, K. R., Nguyen, H. X., & Sellers, R. M. (2009). Racial socialization and racial identity: African American parents' messages about race as precursors to identity. *Journal of Youth Adolescence*, 38, 189-203.
- Okazawa-Rey, Robinson, Ward (1986). Black women and the politics of skin color and hair. *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 14(1/2), 13-14.
- Parker, S., Nichter, M., Nichter, M., Vuckovic, N., Sims, C., and Ritenbaugh, C. (1995). Body image and weight concerns among African American and white adolescent females: Differences that make a difference. *Human Organization*, 54(2), 103-114.
- Perkins, K. R. (1996). The influence of television images on black female' self perceptions of physical attractiveness. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 22(4), 453-469.

- Phinney, J. S. (1989). Stages of ethnic identity development in minority group adolescents. *The Journal of Early Adolescence*, 9(34), 34-49.
- Phinney, J. (1992). The multigroup ethnic identity measure: A new scale for use with adolescents and young adults from diverse groups. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 7, 156-175.
- Plummer, D. L. (1995). Patterns of racial identity of African American adolescent males and females. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 21(2), 168-180.
- Poran, M. A. (2002). Denying diversity: Perceptions of beauty and social comparison processes among latina, black, and white women. *Sex Roles*, 47(1/2), 65-81.
- Prince, A. (2009). *The politics of Black women's hair*. Ontario, Canada: Insomniac Press.
- Roberts, D. (2002). *Shattered bonds: The color of child welfare*. New York: Basic Civitas Books.
- Roberts, R. E., Phinney, J. S., Masse, L. C., Chen, Y. R., Roberts, C. R., and Romero, A. (1999). The structure of ethnic identity of young adolescents from diverse ethnocultural groups. *The Journal of Early Adolescence*, 19, 301-322.
- Rooks, N. M. (1996). *Hair raising: Beauty, culture, and African American women*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.

- Rosenburg, M. (1965). *Society and adolescent self-image*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Sanders Thompson, V. L. (1994). Socialization to race and its relationship to racial identification among african americans. *The Journal of Black Psychology*, 20(2), 175-188.
- Schwartz, A. (2007). "Caught" versus "taught": Ethnic identity and the ethnic socialization Experiences of African American adolescents in kinship and non-kinship foster placements. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 29, 1201-1219.
- Sellers, R. M., Caldwell, C. H., Schmeelk-Cone, K. H., & Zimmerman, M. A. (2003). Racial identity, racial discrimination, perceived stress, and psychological distress among African American young adults. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 44(3), 302-317.
- Sieber, R., & Herreman, F. (2000). *Hair in African art and culture*. New York: Prestel
- Smith, C. J., & Devore, W. (2004). African American children in the child welfare and kinship system: From exclusion to over inclusion. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 26, 427-446.
- Smith, L. R., Burlew, A. K, & Lundgren, D. C. (1991). Black consciousness, self-esteem,

and Satisfaction with physical appearance among african-american female college students. *Journal of Black Studies*, 22(2), 269-283.

Stevens, J. W. (1997). African American female adolescent identity development: A three-dimensional perspective. *Child Welfare*, 76(1), 145-172.

Stevenson, H. C., Reed, J., & Bodison, P. (1996). Kinship social support and adolescent racial Socialization beliefs: Extending the self to family. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 22(4), 498-508.

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory 2nd Ed.* California: Sage Publications.

Struchen, W., & Porta, M. (1997). From role-modeling to mentoring for African American youth: Ingredients for successful relationships. *Preventing school failure: Alternative education for children and youth*, 41(3), 119-123.

Thornton, M. C., Chatters, L. M., Taylor, R. J., & Allen, W. R. (1990). Sociodemographic and environmental correlates of racial socialization by black parents. *Child Development*, 61(2), 401-409.

Turnage, B. F. (2004). Influences on adolescent African American females' global self esteem: Body image and ethnic identity. *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Diversity in Social Work*, 13(4), 27-45.

US Department of Health and Human Services. (2011). The AFCARS report: Preliminary FY 2010 estimates as of June 2011 (18).

US Government Accountability Office (2007). *African American children in foster care.*

Washington, DC: Government Printing.

Van Sertima, I. (1988). The African eve: Introduction and summary. In I. Van Sertima

(Ed.) *Black women in antiquity*. New Jersey: Transaction Publishers.

Wade, T. J. (1996). The relationships between skin color and self-perceived global,

physical, and Sexual attractiveness, and self-esteem for African Americans.

Journal of Black Psychology, 22(3), 358-373.

White, C. R., O'Brien, K., Jackson, L. J., Havalchak, A., Phillips, C. M., Thomas, P, &

Cabrera, J. (2008). Ethnic identity development among adolescents in foster care.

Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal, 25, 497-515.

Yarbrough, C. (1988). Female style and beauty in ancient Africa: A photo essay. In I.

Van Sertima (Ed.) *Black women in antiquity*. New Jersey: Transaction Publishers.

Appendix A

Portland State University

Consent Form

Title: A Qualitative Approach to Exploring the Hair Care Experiences of African American Female Adolescents in Foster Care Study

Principal Investigator: Lakindra Mitchell Dove, MSW Ph.D. Candidate

Doctoral Advisor: Laurie Powers, Ph.D.

Procedures:

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in an interview at a place and time that works best for you. I will ask you questions about your life, your hair, how you feel about yourself, and your relationships with other people. You will be asked to make a collage about hair and then talk about the collage and what it means to you. You'll talk with me about what you like or don't like about hair and what adults say to you about your hair. I'll ask you what other people could do to make you feel good about your hair and care for it in the way you want. I will also ask you questions about foster care and the people who take care of you. The interview will be about an hour. I may contact you in 1-3 months to talk about my summary of your interview and ask if you agree with my summary, or have anything to add.

Purpose:

The goal of this study is to learn about how African American girls in foster care feel about their hair. I want to know if girl's feelings about hair affect how they feel overall. I also want to learn about girls' experiences in taking care of their hair, and what other people say and do that helps or not. Finally, I want to learn what could be done to help African American girls in foster care feel good about their hair and take care of hair in that way that they want.

Risks and Safeguards:

If the questions make you feel upset or and you want to talk to someone, I will find you a counselor. The interview will be audiotaped with your permission, and you may choose to not be taped or to have the tape turned off at any time.

Benefits:

By being in this study, you may help us learn more about how African American girls in foster care think about their hair, their hair care experiences, and what other people should and should not do to help.

Confidentiality:

I will not use your name or any other personal information that could identify you in reports I write about the study. What you say on tape will be written down, and the tape will be erased as soon as it is transcribed or written on paper. I will not tell anyone, including your caseworker, that you are in the study.

Exceptions to Confidentiality:

Under Oregon law, suspected child abuse, elder abuse or abuse of people who get developmental disabilities or mental health services must be reported to appropriate authorities. We also have to share information required by a court order from a judge. If you tell me that you are harming yourself or are thinking about harming yourself, I will need to tell someone who could help you. If I make a report, I will tell you and invite you to participate, if you want.

Costs:

There is no cost to you for being in this study. You will be provided bus tickets for transportation to and from the interview if needed. You will also get a \$25 gift card as a thank you for your time.

Participation:

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a study participant, you may contact the Human Subjects Research Review Committee, PSU Office of Research Integrity 1600 SW 4th Ave. Market Center Building Ste. 620, Portland, OR 97207, 503-725-2227 or 1 (877) 480-4400. If you have any questions about the study itself, please contact Lakindra Mitchell Dove at lakindra@pdx.edu.

Being in this study is up to you. If you want to be in the study, then later change your mind, you may quit at any time. That is ok and you can still get the benefits.

Signatures:

- I understand the information in this form.
- My questions have been answered.
- I agree to take part in this study.
- No one is making me be in this study.
- I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form.

Youth Assent:

Printed Name of Youth

Signature of Youth

Date

Printed Name of DHS Representative/Legal Guardian

Signature of DHS Representative/Legal Guardian

Date

Appendix B

Interview Guide

Questions will be introduced and adjusted based on the particular situation of each participant (e.g., age youth entered foster care, living situation)

Opening:

I would like to invite you to participate in making a collage. I want to learn more about your thoughts and ideas about your hair. Here are some items that you can use (paper, magazines, scissors, and glue) to create your collage. I would like you to cut out pictures or words that represent your thought and ideas about hair. Do you have any questions? I will give you 20 minutes to complete the activity, and then we will take about your collage. I want to learn more about your hair care experiences, both good and bad, and learn about what hair means to you and how hair may be influencing who you are as a person. I have a set of questions I would like to ask, are you ok with that?

Now I would like to talk about hair.

1. How do you typically style/wear your hair?

Probes: How did you decide on this style for your hair?

Are there other ways you style/wear your hair?

What type (texture) of hair do you have?

2. Who does your hair? (i.e. yourself, a beautician, or someone else)

Probes: How did you learn, who taught you?

How long has someone else been doing your hair?

3. How often is your hair done?

Probes: How long does it take to do your hair?

Where do you get your hair done?

If there's a cost, who pays for it?

4. Are you expected to take care of your own hair?

Probes: If so, do you know how to do your own hair?

Would you like someone else to do your hair?

I would like to learn about how you feel about and care for your hair.

5. Is your hair and how it looks important?
6. What do you like about your hair?
7. What don't you like, if anything?
8. How do you feel when your hair looks the way you want?
9. How do you feel when your hair doesn't look good?

Probe: Does it affect what you do or say?

How do you know when you're having a bad hair day?

Probes: Do you have a hair care/maintenance routine?

What type of products do you use?

Next I want to talk about your hair experiences. This could be any experience good or bad, that you remember about your hair. Tell me about a hair experience that you remember most.

Probes: Why does this experience stand out? Was it good or bad?

Why do you think you had that reaction to the experience?

What are some other experiences, either good or bad?

10. When did you start thinking/caring about your hair?

Probes: How old were you when you started taking care of your hair?

Do you feel you know how to take care of your hair?

11. What do you do with your hair that makes you feel good?

Probes: What do other people tell you about your hair?

12. What do other people like your friends, family, teachers, or caseworker say about your hair?

Probes: Do other people recognize your hair, what do you hear them say?

What do boys/males say about your hair?

What do other Black/African American females say about your hair?

What do other people who aren't Black/African American say about your hair?

Is there a difference between people's reaction to your hair, if so, why do you think so?

What do you think society feels about hair among other races/ethnicities than your own?

13. How is hair different for African American girls/women, compared to others?

Probes: Why do you think this difference exists?

One thing I am interested in finding out is whether being in foster care and addressing hair/hair care is different for African American female adolescents in foster care.

14. Who do you consider a support person in your life? Why?

15. You said XXX helps with your hair now? Did you know this person before you went into foster care?

Probes: What does this person do to help with your hair?

How comfortable do you feel asking this person for help?

How often is this person available?

What has this person done that's helpful?

Are there other things you wish this person would do (or not do) to help?

16. Besides this person, are there other people who have helped with your hair?

(repeat above probes as relevant for additional people named).

17. Are there traditions that have been passed down from your family or others that have helped you with your hair? If yes, what are they? How have they been passed down?

18. Have you ever had any difficulty with getting your hair done?

Probes: How did this impact you?

What did you do?

How was the situation addressed?

19. What do you think the foster care system knows about culture and hair/hair care for African Americans?

Probes: What type of information would be helpful?

20. How has the foster care system been supportive in addressing your hair care needs?

Probes: What would you change, if anything?

What would this look like?

21. What could foster parents do to show they care about girls with hair like yours?

22. What could caseworkers or others do?

Closing:

“If there is anything we have not discussed and you feel it would be important to add to the study, please feel free to share at this time... thank you for your participation.”

Appendix C

Demographic Questionnaire

ID #: _____ Age: _____

Race/Ethnicity: _____

School: _____ Grade: _____

Length of time in foster care: _____

Number of placements: _____

Current type of residence (i.e. with family, not with family, group home, on your own, other):

How would you describe the texture of your hair?

Do you wear your hair natural (i.e. no heat or heat such as press/flat iron), or use chemicals (i.e. perm, relaxer, dye)?

What type of hair care products do you use?

Do you have contact with you biological family? If yes, with who and how often?

Are you involved with any community organizations, programs, or activities, if so what are they?

Sports _____

Dance _____

After School Programs _____

Church/faith-based activities _____

Community Centers _____

Other _____