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Beholding the Beauty of Self: The Psychological Integration of the Afrocentric-Self among African-American Females Socialized in a Eurocentric Aesthetic

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BEHOLDING THE BEAUTY OF SELF: THE PSYCHOLOGICAL INTEGRATION OF THE AFROCENTRIC-SELF AMONG AFRICAN-AMERICAN FEMALES SOCIALIZED IN A EUROCENTRIC AESTHETIC

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ABSTRACT

Self-esteem and body image disturbances prominently figure into many physical and psychological health disorders such as depression, eating disorders, anxiety disorders, and chemical dependency. In Euro-American culture, media images of femininity and physical attractiveness reinforce generally held perceptions of the idealized female beauty as tall, white, slender, and often blond and blue eyed. The physical morphology of African-American women does not genetically "fit" this westernized standard of beauty with implications for their mental health.

The socialization of African-American women in a culture that embraces a different ethnic standard of beauty influences their perceptions of how physically attractive they see themselves. This may affect their self-esteem and produce body image disturbances that put them at risk for mental health problems. Many of these women seek emotional healing and a sense of empowerment from the mental health care system. Mental health professionals must consider that gender and racial influences, embedded in a Eurocentric aesthetic, play a significant role in providing culturally competent mental health care.

Dimensional analysis was used in this grounded theory study to produce theoretical understandings of these societal and psychological issues. The Psychological Integration of the Afrocentric-Self is the central dimension that creates an understanding of how many African-American women resist a Eurocentric aesthetic and develop their own perceptions of physical attractiveness. Linked dimensions included the legacies of slavery and resistance that influenced the roles of the family, society and the media on the self-esteem and body images of African-American women.

Conducting this research from a Black feminist perspective provided an avenue for these participants to share their experiences of racism, sexism, and classism in this society and to surface how they resist this oppression. The self-defined standpoint shared by each participant was deemed valid knowledge because it was "her truth" and a true expression of her experiences in the context of her life. A complex, multi-dimensional way of knowing was generated through the voices of these participants. The application of this new understanding to clinical practice in mental health settings is beneficial to the researcher, African-American women, the mental health community, and society.

DEDICATION

To my wonderful parents, Mr. Don E. Cook, Sr. and Mrs. Christine Cook

Thank you for your Unconditional Love,

Boundless Support, Encouragement, and Inspiration.

You have always believed in me, which is why I believe in myself.

To my brother Don E. Cook, Jr.

Thank you for your love, support, siblingship

and sense of humor that is impossible to outmatch.

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me company, napping at the computer,

as I spent countless hours engaged in writing this dissertation.

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PREFACE

TRUE BEAUTY IS. . . . .

The gnarled hands of your grandmother. . . they have the beauty of experience.

The toothless smile from a child. . . it has the beauty of innocence.

The exhausted eyes of a woman who just birthed. . . she has the beauty of strength.

The toothless smile lines marking your mother's face. . . they have the beauty of wisdom.

The dirty chipped fingernails of a gardener. . . they have the beauty of contact with nature.

The hearty belly laugh of your sister-friend. . . she has the beauty of humor.

Tears running down the face of a woman realizing her relationship is over. . .they have the beauty of honesty.

The true beauty of a woman is reflected in her heart and soul, the place where love resides.

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Chapter 1

Phenomenon of Interest

Beauty is an enigma. The concept of beauty is as enticing as it is elusive. The search for beauty spans centuries and continents. Familiar clichés remind us that beauty is only skin-deep, pretty is as pretty does, and of course, beauty is in the eye of the beholder. At its best, beauty celebrates. At its worst, beauty discriminates. In American culture, medical charts dictate the ideal body weight according to height. Mathematical ratios are used to measure facial symmetry in an attempt to quantify physical beauty. Media images of femininity and physical attractiveness, using predominantly European-American models, reinforce the generally held perception of what is considered the ideal female and the ideal feminine physique. From a global perspective, when confronted with the question of identifying physical attractiveness, the answer may very well depend on who is being asked the question and may depend on what definition of beauty is being applied.

I believe that the socialization of African-American women within a majority culture that embraces a different ethnic standard of beauty has an influence on the development of their perceptions of how physically attractive they see themselves. Further, I contend that the way African-Americans perceive the physical attractiveness of others is a reflection of how physically attractive they perceive themselves.

Many African-American women who are struggling to overcome self-esteem and body image disturbances are seeking emotional healing and a sense of empowerment from the mental health care system (Boyd-Franklin, 1991; Holcomb-McCoy, 2001;

Martin, 1995; Sue, 1987). Therefore, the inclusion of bio-cultural considerations, such as gender and race, play a significant role in providing competent mental health care to African-American females and other women of color. This study seeks to understand how African-American women's self-perceptions of physical attractiveness develop in a society that embraces a Eurocentric standard of beauty. Admittedly, this phenomenon is not unique to African-American women socialized in the United States of America. Regardless of race, most women in this country are subjected to the same westernized values of physical attractiveness, which may also influence the way they see themselves and others.

African-American Women and the Mental Health Care System

Traditional counseling practices have been aimed primarily at White middle class males whose cultural upbringing and life experiences differ considerably from that of the African-American female. The literature consistently points out shortcomings in the delivery of mental health care to people of color, such as being exclusionary. The life experiences of those whose socialization differs from that of white males in this country are often not taken into consideration (Sue, 1987).

Research also shows that ethnic-minority groups have significantly higher dropout rates from psychotherapy than Whites (Maass-Robinson, 2001; Sue, 1987; Terrell, 1984). The single most important explanation offered was the inability of the therapist to provide culturally responsive forms of mental health treatment (Nickerson, 1994; Poston, 1991). Specific reasons cited for not providing culturally competent care included the lack of bilingual therapists, stereotypes that therapists have of minorities, and discrimination (Sue, 1987).

When counseling a woman of African-American decent, the historical, psychosocial, and sociopolitical context in which she exists should be carefully examined. Consideration should be given to the psychological impact of the life experiences of a person of color who has been socialized in American society. African-American females seeking mental health services may see a different world than does mainstream America. The life experiences of a woman of color socialized in a White, male dominated society is likely to be shaped and influenced by her existence as a racial minority in this country (hooks, 1981; Sue, 1987).

Although culture plays a key role in shaping the worldview of African-Americans, this aspect of socialization does not stand-alone. Gender is also an aspect of socialization that influences worldview. In the United States, women are often socialized to be submissive, which could be linked to self-esteem disturbances (Bierig, 1991). According to Bierig (1991), this submissive stance, coupled with a disturbance in self-esteem, often engenders fear in the woman who is confronting damaging physical, emotional, and psychological actions of others. Remaining in a physically and/or emotionally abusive relationship may ultimately lead to psychological dysfunction and victimization of the woman.

The therapists' inclusion of cultural considerations increases awareness and sensitivity to those whose life experiences differ from the mainstream (Terrell, 1984; Zelvin, 1999). The literature indicates that the inclusion of cultural considerations such as gender and race is a critical component of the psychotherapeutic relationship (Boyd-Franklin, 1991; Nickerson, 1994; Sue, 1981; Sue, 1987). Providing culturally competent mental health care may create a stronger therapeutic alliance, possibly decreasing the

likelihood of premature termination of therapy. Therefore, in order to provide culturally responsive care, the mental health clinician must consider both issues of gender and race in counseling the African-American female.

Purpose of the Study

A significant body of knowledge exists regarding the correlation between self-esteem and body image disturbances (Hall, 2002; Matz, 2002; Sondhaus, 2001). Self-esteem and body image disturbances prominently figure into many physical and psychological health disorders such as depression, eating disorders, anxiety disorders, dysfunctional relationships, and drug and alcohol addictions. The influence of self-perceptions of beauty/physical attractiveness on the self-esteem and body image of the African-American female has yet to be extensively explored. The psychosocial process involved in the development of the African-American woman's self-perceptions of physical attractiveness in the context of a westernized standard of beauty remained unclear.

The purpose of this study was to understand how the African-American female's self-perceptions of physical attractiveness develop in the context of a westernized standard of beauty and how these perceptions influence her self-esteem and body image and therefore her mental health state.

More specifically, this study pursued the following lines of inquiry:

1. How do African-American females develop their perceptions of physical attractiveness in the context of a westernized (Eurocentric) standard of beauty?

2. How do these perceptions influence the self-esteem, and body image of the African-American female?

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions were employed:

1. Beauty: Attractive physical features, which are appealing and pleasing to the eye.
2. Aesthetic: Concerned with beauty or the appreciation of beauty.
3. Physical Attractiveness: Aesthetically pleasing, good looking.
4. Self-Esteem: One's positive or negative opinion or regard of self; level of self -confidence.
5. Body Image: The perception or mental picture of the body, physique (size and shape) based on self-observation and the reaction of others.
6. Afrocentric: Reflective of the history, culture, beliefs, values and practices of African ancestry.
7. Colorism: A form of discrimination prevalent in the African-American community whereby lighter skin tones are preferred, and darker skin tones are considered less desirable. It may also include hostility towards those with lighter skin tones stemming from residual anger from perceived historical discrimination against those with darker skin tones.
8. Eurocentric: Reflective of the history, culture, beliefs, values, and practices of European ancestry.
9. Healthcare behaviors: Ways in which one's physical, psychological, emotional, social, and spiritual needs are expressed.

Additionally, the concept of beauty was limited to physical characteristics (facial features, hair, and skin color) and physique. "The terms "physical attractiveness" and "beauty" were used interchangeably.

Significance of the Study

As a psychiatric nurse clinician, I have encountered many African-American females who enter into counseling to address issues of depression, alcohol and substance abuse, and dysfunctional interpersonal relationships. These presenting problems appear to be related to poor self-esteem, body image disturbances, and ego dysfunctions. I believe that a woman who has a positive perception of her own physical attractiveness, positive self-esteem, and a positive body image is more psychologically equipped to overcome obstacles of racism and sexism and may have a lower risk of developing dysfunctional behaviors such as drug addictions, situational depression, and unhealthy interpersonal relationships. Ultimately, African-American women in treatment may be empowered by the clinician to reach an optimal level of functioning and psychological well being, through a mutual understanding of the social and cultural roots of the presenting mental health problems.

One of the direct benefits of this study that is useful to nursing is that the knowledge gained could be used to generate a theoretical understanding of how the African-American female's perceptions of physical attractiveness develop and influence her self-esteem. An increased awareness and understanding of this phenomenon may be of mutual benefit to the nurse researcher, psychiatric nurse clinician and ultimately the African-American female client. Findings from this study could add to the limited body of nursing research regarding this phenomenon. Mental health practitioners from the

disciplines of medicine, social work, psychology, and psychiatry could also benefit from the findings of this and future studies regarding this phenomenon. Finally, the substantive beginning theory generated from this study may lay the groundwork for future studies that continue to explore the relationship between self- perceived physical attractiveness, self-esteem, body image, and health care behaviors of the African-American female.

Summary

The concept of beauty/physical attractiveness can be defined in many ways. Perceptions of beauty are strongly influenced by culture, gender, and ethnicity. Social consciousness of physical attractiveness is closely linked to self-esteem and body image, particularly in women (Bierig, 1991). Women with self-esteem and body image disturbances may be more at risk for psychiatric disorders such as anxiety, depression, substance abuse, and dysfunctional interpersonal relationships.

An increased understanding of how the African-American female's self-perceptions of physical attractiveness develop in a westernized standard of beauty and how these perceptions influence her self-esteem and body image could contribute to advancing nursing theory. The results of this study lay some groundwork for further research studies with African-American women and other women of color involved in the mental health care delivery system.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

Extensive research exists which examines the concepts of beauty/physical attractiveness, self-esteem and body image. This review of the literature consists of defining the concept of beauty operationally, biologically, scientifically and philosophically. The concept of beauty/physical attractiveness is discussed from a feminist as well as from a cultural perspective, and includes a historical overview of perceptions of beauty/physical attractiveness in the context of African-American culture. Additionally, the social and media influences on the concepts of beauty, ethnicity, self-esteem, and body image are examined individually and collectively. Finally, a select number of studies that specifically address issues of skin color in relationship to self-perceived physical attractiveness in the African American population are discussed and analyzed.

Definitions of Beauty

Beauty is defined by The Oxford Desk Dictionary and Thesaurus (1997), as "1) combination of shape, color, etc., that pleases the senses, 2) loveliness, attractiveness, elegance, aestheticism." Here, the abstract, subjective concept is operationally defined. Biologically, parallels are made between the animal world and human beings in that attractiveness is equated with genetic quality (Newman, 2000). The innate motivation is to select a mate who is best suited to pass on the gene pool (Cowley, 1996). Scientists see beauty as health (Chen, 1997; Fink, 2001; Reis, 2001). Attractiveness is a theme used by

the media as a direct form of marketing and advertisement, which promotes the desirable attributes of youth and fertility (Kalick, 1998; Thornhill, 1999; Vacker, 1993).

From a philosophical perspective, physical beauty is viewed as an important factor in the human experience. For some, the greater the life experiences and values, the broader the definition of beauty becomes. Brand (1999) posits that a contemporary philosophical approach be used in examining the concept of beauty. Sexuality, gender, and race should be placed at the forefront of analyzing experiences of beauty in nature, the human body, and art, in an attempt to provide a contextual point of reference for the discriminating eye.

In the context of beauty, just how important are the reflected values and general ideas about what is considered good, desirable, and correct within a society? The psychosocial constraints society places on the lives of women in terms of meeting a westernized standard of beauty is a feminist concern (Martin, 1994). This is evidenced by the strong emphasis that women place on caring about their physical appearance. When subscribing to the cultural norms of physical attractiveness in the United States, women may perceive pressure to conform to dominant societal ideas of feminine beauty and are likely to be in a constant drive to look young and thin, thereby influencing how women see themselves in terms of self-esteem and body image (Brand, 1999; Martin, 1994). Non-conformity with societal standards of physical attractiveness can result in a variety of mental health issues such as chronic depression, obesity, anorexia, bulimia, or chemical dependency (Noles, 1985; Shisslak, 1990; Willcox, 1996).

Lastly, Afrocentrically defined, beauty is a synthesis of both physical attributes and spiritual qualities (Chambers & Clark, 1994). Beauty is seen as a function of one's

inner or spiritual self and how one specifically connects to other African-Americans, as well as being related to one's ability to contribute to the survival of the African-American race (Baldwin, 1985; Chambers & Clark, 1994).

Beauty and Afrocentrism

Mirror, mirror on the wall, who's the most beautiful of all? In European-American culture, it is quite doubtful that the response to this question would be depicted by the image of a honey colored or coffee brown female figure with thick hips, whose eyes are not blue, with dark hair that kinks rather than blond tresses that flow. The concept of beauty is culturally defined (Martin, 1994; Mervat, 1988; Rossi, 1988).

Chambers and Clark (1994) assert that in American culture, the epitome of feminine beauty is blond hair, blue eyes, and Caucasian features. This is the yardstick by which others are often measured. This westernized image of beauty is quite unlike the natural physical characteristics of women of color, particularly, the African-American female. The American standard of beauty automatically negates all non-Europeans. So, what does a woman of color do when society says that the answer to the mirror question isn't you?

The African-American female can respond to this social dilemma in two ways. One way to respond is to subscribe and strive to attain the European standards of feminine beauty. The other way to respond is to embrace and internalize a different set of cultural standards of beauty that are self-affirming. This self-affirming response can create a psychological realignment, thereby moving the individual's history, philosophy, beliefs, and experiences of being African-American from the margins into the center of mainstream culture (Chambers & Clark, 1994).

The lens through which one's psychological and socio-cultural experiences are perceived is strongly influenced by worldview (Hatter, 1998). Worldview is defined as a structure of philosophical assumptions, values and principles upon which perceptions of the world are based (Montgomery, 1990). Worldview is highly correlated with cultural upbringing and life experiences. Not only are worldviews composed of attitudes, beliefs, opinions and concepts, but they may also affect thoughts, decisions, behaviors, and perceptions of events (Sue, 1981).

An Afrocentric worldview, or Afrocentrism, is endemic to many African-Americans (Kambon, 1992). Afrocentrism is centered in a spiritual and kinship connection to African culture. An Afrocentric worldview is centered around the beliefs that: the highest value of life lies in the interpersonal relationships between humans; that knowledge is gained through symbolic imagery and rhythm; that one should live in harmony with nature; that spirituality holds much significance and, that all humans are considered to be equal, share a common bond and are a part of the group (Hatter, 1998; Robinson, 1994).

In contrast, a Eurocentric worldview, or Eurocentrism, is centered around the belief that the highest value of life lies in the object or acquisition of the object, knowledge is gained through counting and measuring, one should control and dominate nature, survival of the fittest is of most importance, there is one supreme deity to worship, all men are to be individualistic, unique and different, and competition, separateness and individual rights are the key values people should strive to achieve (Robinson, 1994; Hatter, 1998).

Some researchers conclude that African-Americans whose experiences are oriented in Afrocentrism, as opposed to Eurocentrism, are better able to redefine their sense of self-identity (Mazama, 2001; Robinson, 1994). Some African-Americans who have an Afrocentric view of self are more psychologically protected against subjection to damaging societal messages; therefore, they may have a higher degree of self-acceptance and self-esteem (Robinson, 1994).

In terms of the African-American female and self-perceptions of beauty, Afrocentrism can serve as a psychological buffer against both conscious and subconscious messages of inferiority by the dominant culture (Robinson, 1994). Afrocentricity centers on placing people of African descent in control of their lives and their attitudes about the world. It allows people of African origin to see themselves as key players rather than dislocated victims, thereby breaking the bonds of western domination (Mazama, 2001). In other words, an Afrocentric worldview keeps the psyche, or mental spirit, of the African-American female intact when the mirror does not reflect the blond haired, blue eyed, Eurocentrically valued, westernized image of feminine beauty (Dove, 1998; Jackson, 1992; Robinson, 1994;). For African–American women, moving from an oppressive Eurocentric worldview to an Afrocentric worldview can be both healing and empowering (Jackson & Sears, 1992).

Shades of Beauty: A Historical Perspective

A familiar twentieth century rhyme was psychologically poisonous in the African-American community taunting, "If you're white, you're all right, if you're yellow, you're mellow, if you're brown, stick around, but if you're black, get back!" Attempts were made to reverse this psychic conflict with such poetic sayings as, "the blacker the berry

the sweeter the juice", "Black is beautiful," and "say it loud, I'm Black and I'm proud!" (Kinnnon, 2000). Color stratification still exists in the African-American community in determining levels of attractiveness (Bond, 1992; Breland, 1998; Hughes, 1990). The fact that African-Americans live in a culture that emphasizes physical attractiveness is one possible reason issues regarding skin tone continue to be so powerful (Breland, 1998; Russell, 1992). In order to understand this dynamic, the historical and political origins of skin color stratification and hair texture preferences of African-Americans socialized in this country are discussed.

Up from slavery: Origins of the color complex. The hue of the skin is a biological factor, which has historically affected the physical, social, psychological, and economic lives of African-Americans throughout history (Chambers, 1994). Many African-Americans have internalized dominant-culture ideas that have historically shown a disdain for their dark skin. Some African-Americans believe dark skin prevents full assimilation into American society, creating a psychic conflict. This cultural dynamic is acted out on a psychosocial level among some African-Americans in the perceptions that light skin is the ideal point of reference for attractiveness, which is further perpetuated by the dominant culture (Hall, 1995).

The origins of skin color biases can be traced back to 1607 in Jamestown, Virginia, when the first English colony was established in the New World. The natives watched pale-skinned strangers clear the wilderness, build forts and plant crops. Twelve years passed before the first white woman came to Jamestown along with the first shipment of Africans. In this new land, new possibilities emerged in terms of miscegenation, or race mixing. What was probably unthinkable in Europe and Africa was

an everyday occurrence in the wilderness. The mixing of Europeans, Africans, and Native Americans resulted in a variety of skin tones and features; however, it is important to note that these primary race groupings differed greatly in their civil liberties and political freedoms. It is at this historical crossroads that power, privilege, and attitudes about skin color evolved in America. There are many dynamics involved in the impact of miscegenation in this country; however, this review of the literature specifically focuses on the politics of the physical attributes of skin color and hair of the African-American female.

The politics of skin color: Then and now. Many African-Americans have internalized light skin as ideal because they were powerless to contest the influence of domination (Hall, 1995). During slavery, labor was typically divided by skin color. Mulattoes, or mixed race slaves, were given coveted indoor assignments such as driver, valet, seamstress, cook, and housekeeper. The physically grueling fieldwork was typically left to dark skinned slaves. White slave masters considered mulattoes more intelligent and capable than pure Africans, who were thought to be stronger and better for doing work in the hot sun. Skin color divided the slaves, creating friction in the cabins. At the end of the day, many light-skinned slaves came to the cabins from the "big house" imitating the ways of upper class white families, sometimes flaunting their education. This created envy and resentment on the part of dark skinned field slaves, thusly creating animosity within the Black race (Russell, 1992).

After the Civil War, mulattoes no longer had distinction from the dark skinned masses. During Reconstruction, the "light skinned," colored elite began to segregate themselves into a separate community in order to preserve their social status, thereby

discriminating against their darker brethren. In a further attempt to maintain a social hierarchy, mulattoes began to form exclusive "blue vein" social clubs whereby membership was based on skin color. In order to be granted membership, an applicant had to have skin fair enough for the purplish veins to be visible at the wrist, which was examined by an expert panel of judges. Membership in a "blue vein" social club was considered an honor. Not until after the Black Renaissance of the 1920's did the influence and presence of mulatto social clubs weaken (Russell, 1992).

Color bias within the African-American community also permeated the Black church. At the turn of the twentieth century, Black families wishing to join a color conscious congregation might first be required to pass the paper bag or door test. The paper bag test consisted of sticking an arm in a brown paper bag. The skin had to be lighter than the bag in order to attend church services. Some churches painted their doors a light shade of brown and anyone whose skin was darker than the door had to worship elsewhere (Russell, 1992).

Consequently, there have been over two centuries of race mixing between Africans, Whites, and Native Americans, resulting in a population of African-Americans with a rainbow of skin colors who are more racially mixed than pure. The institution of slavery in America resulted in a quest for physical, psychological, social and economic survival of Americans of African decent, laying the groundwork for a pattern of colorism in Black America that many argue still exists today.

The importance of skin color as an indicator of physical attractiveness continues to be a topic of great debate in the African-American community. The language of skin color speaks of "high-yellow," "red-bone," "high-brown," "medium-brown," and "blue-

black" (Kinnon, 2000). In some African-American families, obsession with color may begin even before the birth of the child. Families are often anxious about the color and features of the newborn. Following routine questions about the sex, weight, and health of the baby, the question of who the baby looks like is posed. This is a round about way of asking about the skin color and features of the baby. African-American children are exposed to the trans-generational unresolved guilt, jealousy, anger and depression about skin color dynamics early in life (Russell, 1992). Noticing overt and covert messages of color bias from parents and older relatives in their extended families, siblings often use skin color variances as leverage in ordinary sibling rivalries. Skin color issues also emerge when children reach dating age. In some African-American families, not only are children discouraged from marrying someone of a darker hue, but also parents may insist that they marry someone lighter to "lighten the line". Light-skinned African-American women are often seen as in demand because of their potential to "lighten up the race," causing friction and disruption in relationships with families and friends.

Despite the fact that Blacks have strived to eliminate the color hang-ups that exist within the African-American community, beginning with the Black Consciousness Movement, color bias continues to persist in the African-American community, though not as intensively as in years past (Kinnon, 2000). It is further observed that in the entertainment world and in the media, there is a tendency to favor lighter-skinned women with straighter hair (Baldwin, 1985). These physical characteristics are seen as advantageous in the society where the standards of beauty are connected with looking Caucasian (Kinnon, 2000).

Skin Color Variations and Perceptions of Physical Attractiveness

The implication of equating light skin with physical attractiveness, in African-American culture, is a concrete illustration of the impact of cultural domination (Russell, 1992). Noted African-American psychologist, Dr. Alvin Poussaint asserts that in European and American society "Whiteness" is held in the greatest esteem (Kinnon, 2000). Disdain for dark skin is a clear expression of dominant culture ideas that currently exist in the United States of America (Hall, 1995).

According to Russell (1992), the desire for light skin is universal. Throughout Central and South America, Asia and Africa, society is prejudiced against those with dark skin, especially young dark women. In a race-stratified society like America, the degree of pigmentation has historically meant the difference between freedom and enslavement, the rich from the poor and the attractive from the plain.

Several research studies specifically explored the phenomena of preferences of skin color or hue in the African-American population (Bond, 1992; Chambers, 1994; Hughes, 1990; Russell, 1992;). Previous studies give insight into the concept of self-perceptions of physical attractiveness of African-Americans in relationship to physical attributes. Several studies address issues of skin color in relationship to self-perceived physical attractiveness in the African-American population.

Chambers and Clark (1994) looked at the relationship between perceived physical attractiveness, facial features, and African self-consciousness confirming that there is a significant relationship between the degree of an individual's Afrocentric orientation and the assignment of positive character descriptors and physical attributes assigned to oneself and others. In other words, the way African-Americans perceive others is a

psychological reflection of how they see themselves. Therefore, an Afrocentric orientation is viewed as having a positive effect on the self-esteem of African-American people individually and as a collective group.

Bond and Cash (1992) examined the relationship between skin color and body image among African American college women. They found that although the majority of African-American women showed moderate to high levels of satisfaction with their skin tone, if given the options, most preferred to change their skin to a lighter shade as opposed to a darker shade. With respect to the "ideal" skin tone, most light and medium skin toned African-Americans idealize light skin tones. Regardless of hue, both dark and light complexioned African-American women believed that Black men found light-skinned Black women more attractive. The results of this study are quite telling of the psychic dilemma facing African-American women as they struggle for positive affirmations and self-acceptance. In light of the recent resurgence of Black consciousness in the African-American community, perhaps this struggle has lessened.

Wade (1996) looked at similar concepts and found differing results. He explored issue of skin color and the impact it has on perceived levels of attractiveness and self-esteem in African-Americans. The study concluded that skin color and gender have little effect on the self-esteem of an individual with regard to global, physical, or sexual attractiveness. Dark and fair-skinned females perceived themselves equally in terms of physical attractiveness. On the other hand, dark skinned males saw themselves even more physically attractive than fair-skinned males saw themselves. In analyzing the results of this study, it should be noted that, for the participants, there was no measure of Black

consciousness, which is defined as an awareness of and sensitivity to sociocultural and political issues related to being African-American.

Chambers and Clark (1994) concluded that Black consciousness levels mediate self-perceived physical attractiveness and self-esteem. Perhaps the dark-skinned men in this study have higher levels of Black consciousness than the fair-skinned men, which may account for the disparity in ratings between the two. The results of this study showed that for African-Americans, self-perceptions of physical attractiveness are becoming less dependent of the hue of the skin. Both dark and fair-skinned African-Americans perceive themselves as physically attractive and feel good about who they are. The results of this particular study further suggests that people of color, who are subjected to a westernized standard of beauty, are more readily accepting of the idea that African beauty comes in a variety of shades and colors.

Although some bias for skin color remains on an individual or personal level, it appears to be more of an issue for African-American males today than for African-American females in terms of mate selection (Wade, 1996). In other words, the study concluded that one explanation may be that many prominent athletes and entertainers with high socioeconomic status are dark skinned (e.g., Eddie Murphy, Michael Jordan, or Denzel Washington) and dark skinned men physically identify with these figures. This conclusion is consistent with research findings that show the influence of the American media on perceptions of physical attractiveness, self-esteem, and body image of the African-American population, particularly with the African-American female (Holcomb-McCoy, 2001; Martin, 1994; Mervat, 1988).

The Politics of Black Hair

The politics of Black hair parallels the politics of skin color. For many African-American women, it is a politically charged subject. How an African-American woman chooses to wear her hair can make a statement about her level of identity with her race, socioeconomic class, and lifestyle.

In the African-American community, the tradition of calling hair that is straight and wavy "good" and hair that is tight and kinky "bad" has never gone away. Even during slavery, Black women sought to alter the texture of their hair. Most of the time, her hair would be covered with a bandanna. On special occasions, it might be straightened using some sort of grease. House slaves had access to lard or butter and could sometimes borrow scissors from the master for a stylish trim. Field slaves had to use shears and axle grease, which caused the hair to stretch and break (Russell, 1992).

After the Civil War, mulattoes with straightened hair were seen as more fashionable and other Black women sought that same processed look. Sarah Breedlove, better known as Madam C. J. Walker, tapped into the hair straightening market with the invention of a special scalp and hair preparation formula and the hot comb. Although known as "the hair straightening queen," she insisted that her products were not intended to make Black women look White. Walker claimed that her intention was to give Black women healthy hair so that they would feel more beautiful and confident (Russell, 1992).

Until the 1960's most Black women, and some Black men, straightened their hair. It was the 1960's that brought about a new, fashionable trend..."The Afro". It was politically significant in that those who wore an Afro were associated with the Black Power Movement. The Afro freed women from the bondage of using hair-straightening

products they had been conditioned to since childhood. This trend continued for the next 15 years, after which most African-American women returned to straightening their hair (Russell, 1992).

An increasingly popular natural hairstyle worn by African-American women such as Alice Walker and Whoopi Goldberg is "dread locking." This entails growing curly hair out to the point where it"locks" or kinks around other locks of hair. Some women who wear "locks" describe the style as a spiritual and liberating experience.

For the African-American female, the style of hair she chooses can be viewed as an affirmation of self-love or a rejection of the self. Those who are "happy nappy" may consider straightening as politically incorrect, embracing "whiteness." Other African-American women may see unstraightened hair as a disgrace. The true intentions of the African-American female are subject to the discriminating eye of the beholder and will surely be met with both approval and disapproval. One major social influence on perceptions of physical attractiveness of the eye of the beholder in the United States is that of the media.

Psychosocial and Media Influences

The literature strongly suggests that many African-American women psychologically struggle against an exclusionary westernized image of beauty. The All American beauty is blond-haired, blue-eyed, and thin and because of the immutably opposite racial characteristics of the African-American female, there is little hope of achieving these ideals (Englis, 1994). Furthermore, the media portrayal of the idealized Black woman is still strongly influenced by European standards (i.e. light skin tones, long

straight hair, light eyes, and Caucasian facial features (Englis, 1994; Gulas & McKeage, 2000; Martin & Gentry, 1997).

The idealized images of physical attractiveness found in advertising have been found to have a negative impact on girls' and women's' self-perceptions of beauty (Englis, 1994; Gulas & McKeage, 2000; Martin & Gentry, 1997;). Although it is assumed by various researchers that this is unintentional on the part of advertisers, research shows that the effects can be psychologically damaging to females of all ages and ethnicities (Anastasio, 1999; Baldwin, 1985; Cunninghan, 1995). Media images of beautiful, thin models are portrayed as the picture of health. The result is that many females struggle with depression, anxiety, self-esteem and body image disturbances and may go on to develop severe eating disorders such as anorexia or bulimia, in a desperate attempt to mirror the images of the models seen in advertising (Englis, 1994; Gulas & Mc Keage, 2000; Martin & Gentry, 1997; Silverstein, 1986).

Several studies were found which investigated the psychological effects of idealized media images of beauty in relationship to ethnicity (Anastasio, 1999; Baldwin, 1985; Englis, 1994; Field, 1999). One of the few studies addressing racial differences examined pervasive ideals of beauty disseminated through mass media (Milkie, 1999). Caucasian and African-American teenage girls discussed their interpretation of the meaning and purpose of the cultural symbols in magazines. Significant differences were found along ethnic lines. The teen girls' magazines were held in high esteem and were very much a part of the culture of the White girls. They regarded the images in the teen magazines as central to their ideas of beauty and femininity. In contrast, Black girls read teen magazines less often and were not impressed by the images of beauty portrayed in

them. The Black girls reported not being able to relate to the information and images in the mainstream magazines because they were "for White girls" (Milkie, 1999, p. 198). Most of the Black girls read Ebony magazine, which is aimed at African-American adults, or Essence magazine, which is aimed at African-American women. The Black girls had a more inclusive range of physical appearances and body shapes, as portrayed in the Black media that they accepted as attractive. Finally, the Black girls did not believe that most Black males judge them by the images they see in the White media. They did not believe that Black males desire women who are extremely thin. These findings give way to a closer examination of the issues of self-perceived physical attractiveness and the concepts of body image and self- esteem in the African-American female.

Body Image and Self-Esteem

Body image has been shown to be a significant influence in shaping self-esteem with regards to physical appearance (Hall, 2002; Koff, 1998; Matz, 2002; Wolszon, 1998). Anxiety about body weight and shape begins early for females, often significantly influencing girls and women's mental and physical well-being (Field, 1999). Body image disturbance, empirically defined as having strong negative feelings about the body, is an essential feature of both eating disordered and non-eating disordered women (Matz, 2002; Mervat, 1988; Wolszon, 1998). In American culture, there are discrepancies in what is considered normal body size in men compared to women (Sondhaus, 2001). Men are held to a standard of moderate, muscular build that is generally very much like that of the average man. Women are compared to a cultural ideal that is represented by models, actresses and beauty pageant contestants who represent the thinnest 5% of women (Rossi, 1988; Wolszon, 1998). Unfortunately, this statistical deviation is presented as the norm.

Ninety percent of women do not measure up to the ideal standard of a thin, fashion model physique without extreme efforts of dieting and exercise (Wolszon, 1998). This is reported to be a central reason why many women are significantly dissatisfied with their current body shape and size (Cash, 1986; Sondhaus, 2001). Negative body image has been empirically linked to lower self-esteem, depression and an increased risk of eating disorders (Koenig 1995; Marcotte 2002; Noles, 1985; Wolszon, 1998). Garner, (1997) conducted a study that investigated gender differences in body image and concluded that White women are far more dissatisfied with their weight than their White male counterparts. Weight gain was cited as the most common cause of negative feelings about the body. Women expressed a strong desire to see models that more accurately represent the natural range of body types in the media.

Ethnicity, Body Image, and Self-Esteem

Studies on cultural preferences and racial influences on perceptions of body image and self-esteem show that standards of physical attractiveness can positively or negatively influence body image and can ultimately influence self-esteem (Atalbe, 1998; Damarest, 2000; Powell, 1995). Caldwell, Brownell & Wilfley (1997), examined the relationship among weight, body dissatisfaction and self-esteem in African-American and White female dieters using silhouettes. The results of the study did not support the notion that African-American female dieters are less dissatisfied than are white women with body shape and size. Furthermore, socioeconomic status was seen as a bigger indicator of body dissatisfaction than ethnicity. White women of middle and high socioeconomic status showed higher body dissatisfaction than African-American women of lower socioeconomic status who weighed more than their White counterparts (Caldwell, 1997).

A review of current literature concluded that body image and self-esteem are strongly correlated (Caldwell, 1997; Garner, 1997). Self-perceptions of beauty/physical attractiveness greatly influence the development of body image and self-esteem (Hall, 2002). Self-esteem and body image disturbances influence physical and psychological health care practices such as eating disorders (anorexia and bulimia, obesity), depression, and anxiety (Haugen, 2002; Koenig, 1995; Marcotte, 2002; Nielsen, 2000; Oosterwegel, 2001; Shisslak, 1990; Willcox, 1996).

Much of the research on beauty that was reviewed emerged from advertising and marketing, as opposed to academia. The majority of research available on physical attractiveness emerged out of schools of social psychology. There was a limited amount of literature included on the aesthetic of beauty from a philosophical perspective. The research findings show the necessity of having the Black media as a source of diversity, education, information, and entertainment, not just for African-Americans, but also for mainstream America.

A review of the literature reveals a great disparity between the number of quantitative and qualitative studies conducted on the concepts of beauty, self-esteem, body image, and health care behaviors. More quantitative studies were found that looked at African-American women and perceptions of beauty in relationship to body image and self-esteem. Most of these quantitative studies were conducted in the specialized disciplines of cross-cultural psychology, Black psychology and multi-cultural counseling psychology. No quantitative or qualitative studies were found that have been done on these concepts in the discipline of nursing. More qualitative, grounded theory studies are needed to give voice to the underrepresented populations of people of color in western

society, particularly from the discipline of nursing and in the area of mental health. Nurses provide professional care and services to a diverse population of clients. An awareness of the cultural implications relevant to marginalized populations increases the likelihood of providing culturally competent care.

The preponderance of research conducted on beauty/physical attractiveness has been done in White, male dominated, westernized civilizations whose influence dominates global civilization. The amount of research conducted with women and people of color, particularly African-African women, is quite disproportionately low in comparison to the number of studies conducted with White males. More studies should be conducted with people of color and women, particularly in this area of research to more accurately reflect the diversity and psychosocial issues that exists in society today.

Philosophical View of the Researcher

I claim an affinity with Black Feminist Philosophy, as it is congruent with my way of existing, interacting, and living in the universe as an African-American woman. I whole-heartedly agree with the self-defined standpoint of Black Feminist thought. This philosophical perspective spoke to my mind, heart, and soul because of my belief that women are "knowers" and that their life experiences are a legitimate source of knowledge. Consistent with my feminist views, Black Feminist Philosophy contends that the socialization and life experiences of the African-American female is "her truth", is a valid way of knowing, and can ultimately generate theory and knowledge. Her ways of knowing should not be dismissed as "invalid" or mere "stories" by dominant, traditional, oppressive, academic standards of research.

Conducting research from a Black Feminist perspective promotes a sense of empowerment on a personal level, because of the freedom and creativity it encourages, while still maintaining academic rigor. The Afrocentric orientation of Black Feminist Philosophy is very much aligned with the Afrocentric worldview of many African-American females. Having shared much of my life in the same realm as other African-American women living in America, I was in an optimal position to elicit their stories.. Black Feminist Philosophy provided me with a lens to explore the participant's perceptions of their experiences. Using a Black Feminist Philosophical perspective to conduct a qualitative, grounded theory study is an underdeveloped strategy with enormous potential.

Black feminist philosophy

Black Feminist Philosophy developed from critical social theory. Pioneer Black Feminist philosopher Patricia Hill Collins defines it as a body of knowledge and a set of institutional practices that actively grapple with the central questions facing a group of people in a specific political, social, and historical context. It involves analyzing the changing aspects of social organizations that affect people's everyday lives (Collins, 1998). Black feminist thought involves developing, analyzing and verbally expressing the unique self-defined standpoint of African-American women. This self-defined standpoint is viewed as valid knowledge because it is a true expression of the experiences of the storyteller. In other words, the "experience" of the African-American female is "her truth" and the "truth" of her experience is "knowledge" that is "valid" because "she" says it is "valid" in the contextual experiences of her life. Through engaging in this process, Black women cultivate and value their view of themselves and their world, resisting the

narrow, exclusionary notion of what is deemed as "valid" ways of knowing by the established social order (Collins, 1989). The Black feminist perspective gives voice to the African-American female's experiences of racism, sexism, and classism within the context of American society. It is aimed at empowering African-American women to decide who they are, what they value, and what their political agendas will be (Taylor, 1998).

Black Feminist Philosophy has been suppressed in terms of being recognized as a way to generate knowledge because the White male establishment dictates the knowledge-validation process. According to Collins (1998), positivist methodological approaches require a distancing of the researcher from the object of study, an absence of emotions in the research process and a disregard for the personal ethics and values of the researcher. Additionally, the preferred method for obtaining truth is the ability of the researcher to deliberate a strong position that can withstand criticism (Collins, 1989).

Although Collins strongly supports academic rigor in conducting research, she believes that academic "elitist" in institutions of higher learning that dictate the criteria for what is considered valuable data is in itself oppressive. Traditional research methods often ask African-American women to self-objectify, disregard emotional expressiveness, and debate theoretical knowledge with those coming from a position of power, thereby restricting access to the true experiences of African-American females (Collins, 1989). In other words, research methods have historically been developed from a White male standpoint, which may not accurately reflect or embrace the experiences of the African-American female.

Much of the knowledge and experiences of Black women generated for consideration as theory are considered mere "thoughts" or opinions, but Collins encourages Black feminist thinkers to move outside of the box of traditional frameworks and decide for themselves the epistemology of Black Feminist Philosophy. Simply stated, she strongly advises, "Don't let anyone tell you who you are!" Black Feminist Philosophy encourages Black women to march to the beat of their own drum in accordance to the music we hear. It does not invalidate traditional ways of knowing. It simply recognizes the unsupported position of African-American women's ways of knowing (Collins, 1998).

Using Black Feminist Philosophy as the lens, I explored the unique sociocultural complexities of the phenomenon of interest to create a better understanding of the Black female experience. Black Feminist Philosophy has been personally and professionally reflective of my deep passion and level of commitment in addressing the complex and diverse psychosocial issues of African-American women living in the United States of America.

Summary

Physical attractiveness has been defined and explored operationally, biologically, philosophically, socio-politically, psychosocially, and culturally. Individual perceptions of beauty/physically attractiveness are substantially influenced by culture (Atalbe,1998; Baldwin, 1985; Mervat,1988;), gender (Damarest, 2000; Marcotte, 2002), race (Bond, 1992; Chambers, 1994; Powell, 1995) and the American media (Anastasio, 1999; Englis, 1994; Field, 1999; Gulas, 2000). Studies specifically exploring the psychosocial process involved in the development of self-perceptions of beauty/physical attractiveness (facial

features, skin color, hair, and physique) in the African-American female in a Eurocentric aesthetic were needed to gain further insight into this phenomenon. This study provided such insights, which can now serve as groundwork for further research.

If given a realistic and true alternative to the European-American standard of beauty, such as Afrocentrism, African-American men and women can adopt their own self-affirming images of beauty. It is my assumption that embracing an Afrocentric worldview may help the African-American female to perceive herself as beautiful internally and externally, thereby acquiring a strong sense of self and social identity. Internalization of an Afrocentric worldview by the African-American female may also result in increased emotional fortitude and the ability to sustain healthy physical and psychological self-care practices.

The concept of self-perceived physical attractiveness of the African-American female socialized in a Eurocentric America and the dynamics influencing those perceptions is thought provoking and important. I believe that it is imperative that the psychiatric nurse clinician understands the development of self-perceived physical attractiveness of the African-American female client in order to promote emotional healing, balance, and restoration to stability and wholeness.

Black Feminist Philosophy is a culturally relevant lens through which the phenomenon of interest was viewed because it recognizes the self-defined standpoint of the African-American female as an authentically valid and truthful way of knowing. As an African-American female nursing scholar, I was personally privileged, honored, and obligated to conduct nursing research through the lens of Black Feminist Philosophy.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Qualitative research is a field of inquiry that "involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter in an attempt to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them"(Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 3). Qualitative research uses personal experiences, interviews, and observation, to describe ordinary and difficult situations and problems in a person's life that may be difficult to convey numerically (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Strauss, 1990). Researchers in the social and behavioral sciences, as well as clinicians dealing with issues of human behavior and functioning conduct qualitative research to explore newly identified phenomena or to study a problem from a new angle.

Qualitative research is used to explore a phenomenon of interest about which little is known or that looks at known phenomena in a new way. This study was conducted using a Grounded Theory (GT) research approach. Grounded theory was first developed in the 1960's by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Grounded theory is a qualitative, interpretive methodological approach that is used to describe processes. Grounded theory seeks to discover the derived meaning, contextual conditions, and the interactional processes surrounding a phenomenon from the perspective of the participants. The goal of grounded theory is to construct a working and dynamic theory from the data that will be fused with other theories from related disciplines and ultimately will be useful in application (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Feminist philosophy is congruent with grounded theory because of its compatibility with standpoint epistemology and the cultural studies model (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Black Feminist philosophy then would be congruent with the life experience perspective central to qualitative, grounded theory research.

Grounded theory thrives on creativity, spurring the researcher to new heights by abandoning old assumptions and creating new meanings, associations, and comparisons. The analytical process of discovering the theory that is inductively derived from the data involves systematic data collection and ongoing verifiable analysis of concepts of interest. The theory is then "grounded" in the data, thus providing an explanation of the process of the phenomenon of interest.

Theoretical sensitivity was an integral part of this process. Theoretical sensitivity involves becoming familiar with the technical and non-technical literature about the phenomenon of interest, as well as incorporating personal and professional experiences in order to become "sensitized" to understanding and finding true meaning in the data. In order to keep the right balance between creativity and science, the reality of the data was questioned, and an attitude of skepticism was maintained (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Philosophy of Inquiry

The philosophical foundation of grounded theory is rooted in symbolic interactionism, which is based on the basic assumptions that people act in response to the meanings they give to things, people, and situations. These assigned meanings emerge from social interaction with others and are open to an ongoing process of interpretation (Blumer, 1969). These assumptions are the foundation of grounded theory and the analytical approach of dimensional analysis (Kools, 1996).

Dimensional Analysis

Dimensional analysis was developed by Schatzman (1991) as a specific approach to data analysis. Dimensional analysis emerged from his desire to create an easily recognizable, research paradigm with a specific analytic process that could be used to conduct grounded theory research. Dimensional analysis is based on a theory of "natural analysis" which Schatzman theorized to be a normative cognitive process used by individuals to interpret and understand problem situations, experiences, and phenomena beyond the basic cognitive processes of recognition and recall (Kools, 1996). Schatzman (1991) asserts that dimensional analysis is generally informed by the core ideas and practices of grounded theory but differs procedurally, epistemologically in terms of assumptions and logic.

Dimensional analysis was used in this study to analyze the data from semi-structured interviews, field notes, and observations in the traditional context of qualitative, grounded theory research. Additionally, theoretical and operational memos were used to track the analytical process. The 3 phases of data analysis in dimensional analysis, which are 1) designation, 2) differentiation and 3) integration (Kools, 1996) were used to conceptualize the data.

Designation phase. In this first phase of dimensional analysis, dimensions were identified from the data obtained in the semi-structured interviews. This process is also referred to as dimensionalizing. During this phase, attributes or properties were named and labeled during data collection. No value was assigned to the properties named, as the purpose of designation was to provide nomenclature to describe the data allowing for specificity and comparison of concepts. The primary focus at that point, was to look at

"what all was going on?" A "critical mass" of dimensions related to the phenomena of interest was obtained through the writing of theoretical memos. Using theoretical sampling, data collection, and analysis continued until data saturation was reached and all dimensions were adequately identified, revealing all that was going on in the data (Kools, 1996; Schatzman, 1991).

Differentiation phase. Once a "critical mass" of the dimensions and their properties were identified, the differentiation phase began. An explanatory matrix was used to move from describing the characteristics of the dimensions identified to further explaining the phenomena. The data reached a point of saturation, no longer requiring expansion and theoretical sampling. The innate characteristics of the identified dimensions were differentiated into separate components based on context, conditions, process (actions/interactions), and consequences (Kools, 1996). Dimensions deemed to have great significance with regard to explanatory power were assigned as "perspective." Dimensions deemed to be facilitating, blocking, or shaping action or interaction as viewed by the perspective were assigned as "conditions." Dimensions that described outcomes of specific actions or interactions reflecting the assigned perspective were labeled as "consequences." Dimensions indicating the intended action/interaction driven by the prevailing conditions were identified as "process." Dimensions designating boundaries to the situation/environment and influencing circumstances were designated as "context." The explanatory matrix was used to reconstruct and explain the points of view of the participants of the study. The central dimension, deemed most salient, was the anchor around which other dimensions were clustered and identified. The central dimension coherently explained how African-American females developed their

perceptions of physical attractiveness in the context of a westernized (Eurocentric) standard of beauty. It also helped to explain how these perceptions influenced body image and self-esteem.

Integration phase. In this third and final stage of data analysis, final clarification and integration of the phenomenon of interest was confirmed through theoretical sampling and saturation of the data. The 'perspective' and the relationship between the dimensions identified were confirmed and the explanatory matrix was used to describe the phenomenon of interest. The understanding of the phenomenon became substantive theory (Kools, 1996).

Computer-Assisted Technology

The NVivo software program was used to assist organizing the data as the analysis proceeded. NVivo is a software tool for exploring and interpreting text data and analyzing fine details (Richards, 1999). Some features of this software program included the ability to scan photos and images and provide hyperlinks to illustrations, audio, and video clips. NVivo was designed to integrate coding with qualitative linking, shaping, and modeling. Annotations and rich text memos can be coded, linked, and searched. Rich data can be managed with flexible sets for grouping and attributes for organizing ideas and information in tables that can be imported from or exported to statistics packages. The findings can be pictured in the multi-layer graphical modeler. The NVivo software was appropriate for use in this study.

Investigator as the Research Instrument

My interest in this study originated out of the personal joy and frustration of being an African-American woman, living in a White, male dominated society that values

Eurocentric images of beauty. White America constantly bombards society with media images that reinforce a westernized standard of beauty. I strongly believe that the more closely women meet these internalized, societal standards of beauty in this country, the easier it may be for them to perceive themselves as physically attractive, have a high level of self-esteem and a positive body image.

The African-American females that I have encountered, personally and professionally, who describe themselves as Afrocentric, expand the narrow, Eurocentrically defined notion of beauty. They describe beauty as encompassing more than just the physical attributes of a person and encourage self-appreciation of one's physical characteristics that may be more genetically African as opposed to European. Conversely, the African-American women I have encountered who have solely internalized dominant culture standards of beauty are more rigid and critical of themselves and others in defining physical attractiveness. I have witnessed and participated in intriguing conversations about hair and skin color among friends, relatives, coworkers, acquaintances and strangers of many races, in just about every private and public setting imaginable. These conversations are often very high-spirited and emotional. Sometimes, the conversation involves lighthearted humor, and other times painful insults. Personal conversations I have encountered on this subject have involved those who have a deep social consciousness, as well as those who are woefully uninformed. This is a subject with deep historical, socio-political, and psychological roots, still influencing the personal and public lives of people of color. Admittedly, women of a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds are subjected to the same narrow ideas of beauty in American society. However, I have a strong desire to understand the

struggle of how we, as African-American females, come to value or devalue, as well as embrace or reject our diverse physical attributes, in a society that does not honor racially or ethnically diverse images of beauty. From a professional standpoint, I am interested in gaining a better understanding of the relationship between culture and mental health issues with African-Americans, particularly African-American women. More importantly, I am deeply motivated by my strong passion and desire to understand, share in, and validate the joy and pain of the experience and meaning of being a Black woman.

Enhancing Cultural Sensitivity and Self-Awareness

In the tradition of Black Feminist Philosophy, it is seemingly equally important that the nurse researcher take self-inventory of personal experiences with racial biases and cultural consciousness as a part of the research process, particularly if the researcher is African-American. Self-analysis should be done with regard to self-perceived physical attractiveness of the researcher. For example, I took a personal inventory for skin color biases that exist in my own family history and cultural socialization. As the researcher, I posed the internal question regarding the development of self-perceived physical attractiveness on a personal level. For example, with regard to the issue of black hair, I believe that how a woman decides to wear her hair is clearly a personal choice and assumptions should not be made one way or the other regarding her "blackness" or lack there of. Black hair comes in a variety of textures. In my opinion, there is no such thing as "good hair" or "bad hair." My bottom line is, if you have hair, GOOD!!

Recruitment of Participants and Gaining Entree

This study used an adequate and appropriate theoretical sample of people from which data was obtained, analyzed, and conceptualized. This was achieved through the

recruitment of 17 African-American women, ages 18 and older, from a variety of educational levels and socioeconomic backgrounds. The majority of the participants were accessed through local churches, beauty salons, educational institutions, as well as local social/community service organizations. Select sites were contacted via telephone, or e-mail requesting participation in the study. Verbal approval to post flyers to recruit subjects for the study was provided from each participating agency. Participants contacted the researcher through the contact information provided on the flyer to schedule interview appointments. Like the researcher, all participants had the common experience of living as a Black female in the United States of America. As an African-American female scholar who was researching a topic of interest to many African-American women, gaining entrée into their private worlds was relatively easy.

Description of the participants. Prior to the interview, all participants completed the demographic data form (see Appendix A). All participants were African-American females ranging in age from 28 to 61 ($M = 44$ years). All 17 participants were college graduates with a minimum of a baccalaureate degree. Five participants had baccalaureate degrees, eight had master's degrees, and three had doctoral degrees. A variety of occupations was represented, including school administration, education, nursing, social work, psychology, military officer, engineering, and medicine.

Other demographic information included marital status, where five participants were single, six were married, three were divorced, and two were widowed. The annual household income level ranged from $30,000 to over $100,000 ($M = $70,000).

Data Collection

Participant observation provided an opportunity to gain intimate knowledge of the participants by interacting with them in their natural environment with their having full awareness of the purpose of the interview. The discussion was free flowing, often high spirited, and usually emotionally charged. The interviews were used as the primary approach for data collection. An interview guide was used during the interview process to explore the participants' experiences of how their perceptions of beauty developed, ultimately influenced their self-esteem, and body image. The women were interviewed in their homes or another mutually agreed upon cite that was conducive to conducting the interview.

The interview process began with a skin color exercise. The skin color exercise involved presenting the participants with a spectrum of paint swatches in various shades of brown. The participant was first asked to select the shade of brown most identical to their current skin color. Next, the participants were instructed to select the skin color they preferred to be if given the choice. The option of NOT changing their skin color was purposely not given. Removing this option was necessary, otherwise the majority of participants insisted on not selecting a different shade because they "liked" their current hue. At the conclusion of the skin color exercise, the interview proceeded with key interview questions.

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted and audio taped. A portfolio of pictures of African-American women of varying physical attributes was used to facilitate discussion. Key interview questions were used to guide the interview such as:

1. What are your earliest memories of a female that you thought was physically attractive/beautiful?
2. Describe the physical characteristics of a beautiful woman in this society?
3. How do you personally compare yourself to that definition of beauty?
4. What has your personal experience been in terms of others defining your physical attractiveness and how has that experience influenced how you feel about yourself?

Observational notes were taken before, during and after the interviews were conducted. These observational notes included the researcher's impressions of the environment, physical appearance, and nonverbal cues obtained from the participants. Additionally, theoretical notes were composed that contributed meaning to the observations noted (Schatzman & Strauss, 1973). The theoretical notes were beneficial in clarifying the thoughts and feelings experienced by the researcher. The extensive experience in conducting interviews and assessments in a psychiatric setting was beneficial to the researcher. Probing, open-ended and follow up questions to inferences were used with ease, facilitating the emergence of new concepts during the interview process.

In the tradition of grounded theory, notes from each subsequent interview were compared with the findings of previous interviews (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously, thus keeping the developing theory grounded in the data. When no new themes emerged, the data was deemed saturated.

There were no participant expenses associated with this study. Anticipated expense to the researcher was $500.00, which included the cost of audiotapes and a transcription machine. All of the interviews were transcribed within 72 hours by the researcher.

Risks and Benefits

There was a low risk that some participants would experience psychological discomfort in answering the interview questions. A list of mental health resources for self-referrals was provided to each participant in the event that they felt discomfort or distress. Mental health referrals were available on request or for any participant determined by the researcher to be in need of subsequent counseling because of participation in this study. There were no instances of the need for such a referral for any of the study participants.

Risk Management

Precautionary measures were instituted to prevent unauthorized access to or release of confidential information included coding the identity of each participant, maintaining all audiotaped materials and hard-copy data in a secure, fire proof locked safe whereby the key can be accessed only by the researcher. All electronic data were maintained in password-protected files, with backup computer discs maintained in the safe. All signed consent forms were kept separate from the data.

Ethical and Human Subjects Considerations

All participants were given the opportunity to ask questions which were answered to their satisfaction. Informed consent was obtained from each participant in the study. The informed consent form included full disclosure of the purpose of the study, the potential risk, potential benefits, and expense to the subjects prior to the interview. It was

explained to the participants that their participation was strictly voluntary and that they could end the interview at any time without repercussions. Participants were asked to sign a written consent granting permission to participate in the study and to audiotape the interview. The University of San Diego Human Subjects Committee approved this study.

Chapter 4

Discussion of Findings

The purpose of this study was to understand the process of how African-American females develop their perceptions of physical attractiveness in the context of a westernized (Eurocentric) standard of beauty. The study also sought to gain insight into how these internalized perceptions of beauty influence the self-esteem, body image, and mental health state of the African-American female. For these African-American females living in the United States of America, the process of fully discovering and accepting themselves is a complex, dynamic and continuous process.

The study findings were based on semi-structured interviews with 17 college educated, African-American females, reared and socialized in the United States of America. This chapter is a discussion of the interpretation of the individual and collective experiences of the participants with regard to how their perceptions of physical attractiveness/beauty developed. An explanatory matrix (Figure 1) will be used to explicate the central perspective and supportive dimensions, further depicting an interpretation of the experiences of the study participants.

Opening the interview with the skin color exercise was an intriguing way to stimulate conversation. This is where reoccurring themes first appeared.

Pressure to be Afrocentrically Correct (AC)

Minimal direction was given with the skin color preference exercise so that participants could make their selection freely. Yet, several participants expressed conflicting feelings with choosing to give their most honest answer or the answer that

was most politically correct as an African-American. This suggests that for some, color selection was a reflection of self-acceptance and racial pride as seen in the following examples:

- There was no judgment that you placed on it, you just said select the color that is closest to my color. It wasn't as if one is good or bad, but considering the nature of your study, the undertones are always there for us. The undertone is that White is right. We've heard it all our lives.
- It's tense because I think you're going to judge me based on my selections. As an African-American woman, I feel like I'm supposed to answer that I like the darker skin tones and the kinkier hair, even if it's not true. It's the more politically correct answer.
- I was very conscious of wanting to pick a shade as close to my own shade as possible but not going darker and I think that I didn't think that was the socially acceptable answer to pick but it was an honest answer.
- It was a little uncomfortable just based on what I thought you expected. I think the socially acceptable thing would be to pick a shade darker and I thought that it sounds vain to go lighter.

During this opening exercise, many participants were flooded with strong thoughts and emotions as they reflected on their experiences with colorism. Some memories were recent and some were remote, but in either case, the impact was lasting.

- Growing up, a lot of derogatory terms were used among Blacks, about the color of your skin, you know like "chocolate brown", "blue-black", that kind of stuff.

- I thought about an experience that I had with a bleached blonde White girl who, in a casual conversation, referred to her eye color as "shit brown." I was shocked because I had never heard anyone ever make that analogy. We (African-Americans) all refer to each other as chocolate, toffee, caramel or honey; all these sweet connotations that we associate with brown and all the other hues and I said for the first time in my life, somebody made the analogy of brown being the color of shit. For every shade of brown or beige, we have all these endearing terms as people of color, I had never thought from White people's perspective how they see the color brown and when I heard that, it just gave me so much insight. Now I have a profound understanding of how people from other cultures view our skin color.

The exercise was an effective way to "set the stage" for stimulating conversation about the subject matter and subsequent research questions asked of the participants. As the data was continuously analyzed and interpreted, dimensions were identified, but the most salient dimension that could provide the most explanatory power was the ongoing Integration of the Afrocentric-Self. This central perspective served to bind all other dimensions to the explanatory matrix.

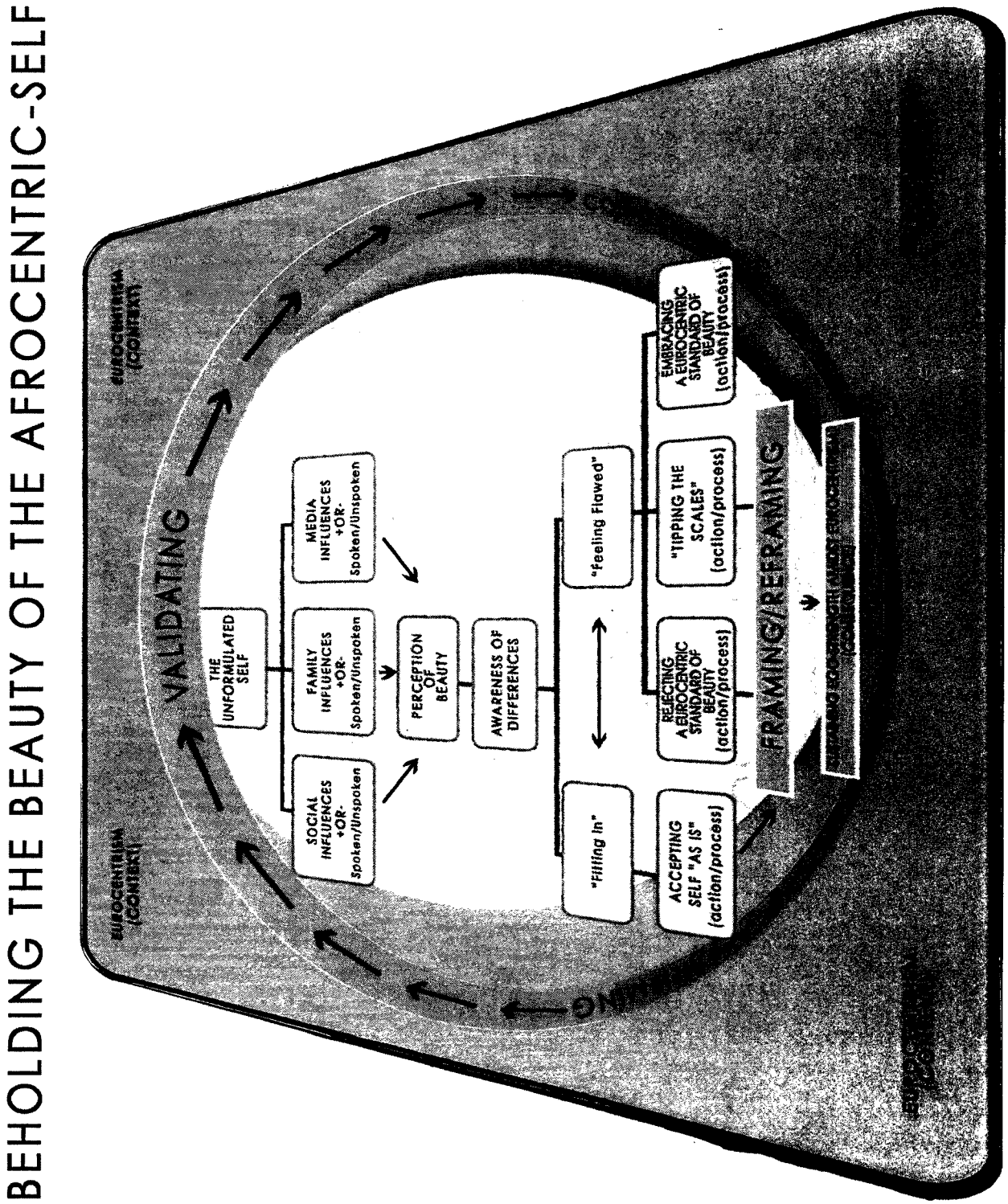

Figure 1. Explanatory Matrix

Integration of the Afrocentric-Self

Integration of the Afrocentric-Self offers a central perspective and provides an explanation of the complex dynamics involved in understanding how African-American females develop their perceptions of beauty in this society. This integration process was interpreted as ongoing and continuous throughout the entire lifespan of the participants. The process begins in early childhood, where a young, impressionable little brown girl begins a life long process of discovering who she is, searching to find her place in the world. Throughout her lifespan, she will invariably have personal experiences and encounter socio-political influences that will construct and/or demolish her positive self-image. As a person of African-American decent socialized in a White male dominated society, she will invariably encounter Eurocentrism.

Eurocentrism is the conscious and subconscious practice of emphasizing Western concerns, values and culture at the expense of other cultures. To some degree, all people socialized in the United States of America are exposed to westernized, White, male dominated influences, regardless of race, color, creed, and gender. It is difficult, if not impossible, to totally inoculate the psyche against these cultural influences. Eurocentrism is the pervasive ambiance in which the participants live, providing context in the explanatory matrix.

There is historical evidence substantiating that the skin color of African-Americans has exerted powerful and persistent influences on societal attitudes and treatment within both White and Black cultures (Bond & Cash, 1992, p.879). The historical underpinning and residual effects of the legacies of enslavement of African people in the United States continues to color and shape the way we see ourselves, relate

to each other, relate to other people, and relate to the world. The history of the physical and psychological slavery in this country is not just intertwined in the fabric of Black history. The fibers are intricately woven in the fabric of American history. Though no longer physically in bondage, many African-Americans continue to struggle to overcome and defy the hegemony of Eurocentrism, both individually and collectively. The first two dimensions, Eurocentrism and the Legacies of Slavery, provide support and linkage to the central perspective of Integration of the Afrocentric–Self. The following components of the matrix reflect the integration process that takes place as the participants continue through life, searching to define and accept themselves. This developmental process begins early in life and continues throughout the life span.

As with all human beings, each participant began life without preconceived notions about physical attractiveness. In this study, this state of being was interpreted as the unformulated self. The beauty that exists is that of innocence, untainted by the influences of the outside world.

The earliest image of beauty most frequently identified by the study participants was an African-American female who was a close relative such as a mother, sister, aunt, or cousin. She was typically described as full-figured or voluptuous. Voluptuous was commonly described as having medium sized breast, a small waist, heavy thighs and round, protruding buttocks.

For the participants in this study, the beauty of a woman was not simply limited to her physical attributes. Their earliest perceptions of beauty were most influenced by the way they experienced the total being of the woman. Strong admiration was shown for the way in which the woman dressed, groomed, and carried herself. For these participants,

the beauty of a woman was captured in her total being. Descriptive words and phrases used included being well dressed, well coiffed, very put together, the total package, sharp dresser, graceful, dignified, proud, and proper. For many participants, these attributes added to her overall appeal.

- My sister was very full-figured. She always had a small waistline and big hips. I think people would call her "bootylicious" today.
- My mother had an aura about her. I don't care what she was doing, you'd just go, "Man, I want to be her when I grow up!" She could be mopping the floor and she just had a look about her that was just so elegant. It was a mature femininity. She didn't have to do anything or work at it. It just exuded from her. My mother was so cool that she didn't perspire.
- My mother carried herself upright with such grace and style, never looking down. She got heavier as she got older but it didn't bother her at all. She could still put her hand on her hip and walk across the room, totally confident that there wasn't another woman prettier than she was. She was a woman of tremendous strength and integrity.

For the women in this study, the beauty of a woman was not limited to what one beholds with the eyes. Beauty is the total experience of the woman, which was defined by her physical attributes, her style, grace, and confidence. Beauty was seen in her movement, her demeanor, her femininity and in her intelligence. Their earliest definition of beauty was in alignment with Afrocentrism in that the full essence of the woman is what mostly defined her beauty. This early identification of a representation of beauty

offered the participants a source of psychological fortitude that they could draw from during situations that challenged their self-esteem later in life.

There were three salient dimensions that influenced the participants perceptions of how beauty was defined, Family, Society and the Media. These influencing experiences were positive and/or negative and were spoken and/or and unspoken. Predictably, the positive experiences buttressed their self-esteem while negative experiences undermined their self-esteem. These positive and negative experiences are discussed in detail in the following sections.

Family Influences

Regardless of race, color, or culture, the family is typically the cornerstone of child development as this is the first set of people charged with providing the child with socialization. Hughes and Demo (1989) found that personal self-esteem was most strongly influenced by relationships with family, friends, and community. Many African-American children are taught at an early age to be proud of their heritage and skin color but many are "color struck" or color conscious, meaning they respond differently to varying shades of dark skin. Participants who had families that enveloped them with positive messages about their appearance, intelligence, talents, skills, and capabilities fostered a positive sense of self worth. This often provided "psychological insulation" against subsequent assaults against their self–esteem. Conversely, participants who did not receive positive messages from family members about themselves during their formative years had a more difficult time establishing a strong sense of self as they developed into adults.

Consistent with the results of having positive African-American images of beauty during early childhood, positive comments from parents/family regarding physical attractiveness were identified as greatly contributing to whether or not participants saw themselves as attractive. Most of the participants felt that their parents/family made a conscious effort to make positive comments about their physical appearance, intelligence and other attributes to instill a positive self- image within them. This contributed to the establishment of a high level of self-esteem and positive feelings about their physical appearance.

- Actually, I grew up getting many compliments by my family about my looks. They'd say I had really soft, beautiful, creamy skin. I always got complimented about my slanted eyes. My aunt used to say that I have beautiful Chinese eyes. My sisters and I complimented each other all the time.
- My parents were very, very, very loving and always thought I was their beautiful daughter and reinforced it by saying it, whether it was through a birthday card, a hug, or a kiss.
- From as early as I can remember, my mom and my cousins were always telling me that I was beautiful, smart and that I could do anything.

Both direct and indirect comments regarding physical appearance influenced how attractive participants saw themselves during their formative years. These participants described the negative impact of these messages on their self-esteem as lifelong. Most of the experiences occurred during childhood, at a time when they were powerless against the negative messages received. In many cases, the participants were left on their own to

find ways to replace the emotionally wounding criticism with unconditional self-love, acceptance, and validation.

- My mother really valued White features. She used to play me and my sister against each other. She would say that my sister had the nicer hair but I had the lighter skin. It was a round about way of putting both of us down because of our African characteristics.
- As a child, up through my teens, my grandmother used to tell me to say the word PRU-INS, PRU-INS to make my lips thinner, especially my bottom lip. It was a negative message that my lips were too full, especially, my bottom lip. I didn't want my lips to be thinner. I was pleased with my lips, but that was the big thing for her.
- My mother was very dark, very, very dark. She felt bad about being dark. She used to say that Black people were ugly, that dark skinned people were ugly. She said they looked like monkeys. She would say that she was ugly because she had dark skin. I felt sorry for her because she wasn't born with lighter skin because that's what she wanted. She had to live in a body she thought was ugly. She really didn't take care of herself physically, so I could see that she really thought she was ugly. I didn't think being dark was a bad thing until she started saying how bad it was.

The subtle and not so subtle messages received from family members in these scenarios were that Afrocentric features are unattractive, unflattering, and undesirable. In the above excerpt, the messages given by the mother was a reflection of her lack of self-love and self-acceptance. It would be an arduous task for her to instill self- acceptance

and self-love in her child in terms of physical appearance when there is a loathing of her own Afrocentric physical attributes. So, what is a child to think of herself when the facial features she is told are ugly are the very same features she sees when she looks in the mirror? Is there any wonder that embracing her physical attributes would be a difficult feat?

Often times, the participants internalized the damaging psychological message received from family members, greatly affecting their self-esteem and body image. Many were simply unable to counteract the negative feelings they had about themselves and their body until later in life.

In summary, regardless of color, race or culture, the first social institution that a child most typically has contact with is the family. The African-American child is no exception. The Black family provides the first opportunity to receive unconditional love and acceptance. Ideally, our parents and other family members clearly show us that we are beautiful as we are, that we are loved, that we are worth loving, and that the world is happy we are here. Any deviation from this premise results in the opposite effect. The parents of an African-American child must often put forth extra effort to show strong support and unconditional love to counteract the negative messages bestowed upon them by other family members who embrace Eurocentric standards of attractiveness. When the parents or other close family members embrace the Eurocentric standards of attractiveness, the child internalize those messages and values a Eurocentric standard of beauty as well. In addition to the family, the study revealed additional outside influences that affect the self-esteem and body image of the participants.

Societal Influences

Not unlike most people in western civilization, society is the next level of interaction for the African-American child. For the participants in this study, social influences included interactions and experiences in schools, churches, neighborhoods, civic organizations and the community at large. Willis (1995) proposed that a school climate, like positive relationships in an extended family, is created through beliefs, governing attitudes, and expectations. Interactions with authority figures (teachers), peers, and respected adults could "build up" or "tear down" the self worth of a child in word or in an encounter. In either instance, these experiences had lasting effects in the hearts and minds of the participants.

A study conducted by Sweeting & West (2001) concluded that children who were perceived as less attractive, overweight, disabled or academically challenged were at a higher risk for being victimized by their peers, regardless of gender or class. If the African-American child is compared to a Eurocentric standard of beauty in terms of physical attractiveness, the child may also internalize that same standard of beauty. A psychological dilemma emerges in that the physical attributes the child has internalized as beautiful are typically unlike her natural physical attributes. She is then left with the message that she is not beautiful because her features are so unlike the images of beauty society tells her are beautiful. With no psychological buffers in place to counteract that message, she may struggle a lifetime to overcome an exclusive notion of what is considered attractive by Eurocentric societal standards.

Many participants cited that receiving positive attention from the opposite sex ("boys") was very affirming and validating, boosting their positive perceptions about

their appearance. They often used the views, opinions, and preferences of the opposite sex as a barometer of what was considered physically attractive. For many participants, this was an early experience of receiving validation outside of the family unit. This was a time of awareness that what other people thought about the way they looked "really mattered." This is seen in the following examples:

- I grew up, as a teenager in the 60's, when the "Black is Beautiful" era was just becoming the thing. Before that, I would hear the 'If you're Black get Back, or whatever the saying was. I was 12 or 13 when the Black Power Movement came along, that's when we were coming into a lot of self-actualization, and everybody was saying you're dark, you're beautiful, and your hair is beautiful.
- I felt pretty good about myself but I was really skinny. So, I felt better in 8th grade when I came back from one summer and I had been doing track and had filled out a little bit. All the boys noticed and were like, Whoa, girl you look good!
- It never really mattered to me what I looked like until I started liking guys. Whichever guy thought a girl was pretty would make me take notice of what they liked. I was about 14, in middle school. That's when guys started to notice me. The older I got, the more I noticed it, and the more I liked it."

Contrarily, other participants reflected on personal experiences encountered with African-American teachers or other African-American people in the community, which negatively influenced their perceptions of how attractive they saw themselves. They confirmed that these negative experiences created lasting effects on their self-esteem and body image, resulting in a continuous search for validation. The most influential opinions

were those of peer groups, such as classmates or children from the neighborhood and those in positions of authority such as teachers and community leaders. The opinions of these people in society weighed heavily on the opinions that the participants had of themselves about their appearance as seen in the following examples:

- To this day, I absolutely HATE my nose because it's big compared to other noses like family members. I didn't know that my nose was big until I got to be 12 years old, and the kids across the street started calling me "schnoz." It was after that I started comparing my nose to other people's noses.
- Growing up, my physical characteristics caused me a lot of emotional pain. My peers teased me because I had a big, flat nose. The older boys did everything from calling me Snuffaluffagus to making pig noises when I'd come in the classroom.
- When I was growing up, I didn't think I was attractive. I would really believe it when people would tell me I was ugly. My Sunday school teacher, who was also African-American, would say to me, you know you are just an ugly, little girl. What do you say to something like that as a kid? After my freshman year in college, I came home for the summer and I went to go see her and she just looked at me and said, you know, you really turned out to be a pretty young girl. I just remember crying because I think it meant a lot for me to get that validation from the person who was actually saying that I was ugly for so many years.

In present society, the implications of skin color are evident in the varied messages received by many African-Americans. Thompson and Keith (2000) described the importance of skin tone in evaluating self-worth and self-competence, asserting that skin color, not achievement, is the main determinant of identity and attitudes about the

self. In American culture, positive attributes and feelings of worthiness based on White skin is a reflection of (unearned) White privilege. The findings of this study confirmed the belief that by conforming to White standards of beauty ensures a more rewarding and successful life.

The schizoid nature of publicly touting racial pride regarding one's Blackness while embracing a Eurocentric ideation of physical attractiveness creates an interesting dichotomy. This was evident during the political revolution during the Civil Rights Movement. African American community leaders theoretically embraced the ideology that "Black is beautiful" stirring racial pride in a political sense but did little to change the deeply engrained Westernized standard of beauty (Bond & Cash, 1992). Consistent with these findings, one particular participant shared her painful memories of the hypocrisy of the Black Power Movement of the 1960's noting that what touted in public arenas was quite different from what was stated "behind closed doors."

- I essentially have no Black male friends. When I did have them, I was never the type they wanted to date. They always wanted to date women lighter than me. During the 70's in all the Black is Beautiful hype, I would tell people all the time, "Don't believe it." Behind closed doors, if you took ten Black men, I don't care what complexion they are, and you lined up ten women of different complexions from lily white to jet-black like me, every one of them would have been picked before me. Nobody was taking me home to their Mom. Black Power this and Black is beautiful that. Yeah, right! Take off that dashiki and the same thing is there!" I was 42 years old when I got married. I never thought I'd get married because I was convinced in my mind that I wasn't the marrying type because of

my appearance, I had never even been asked on a date. So, when my then boyfriend and now husband asked Will you marry me? I was like," What? It was a total shock, but here's the caveat: my husband is White!

Skin color is highly correlated with other phenotypic features such as eye color, hair texture, broadness of the nose and fullness of the lips. European features are ultimately equated with higher social status within and beyond the African-American community. These European traits, in correlation with skin color are perceived as influencing social opportunities, establishing norms regarding physical attractiveness, self-concept, and overall body image (Thompson & Keith, 2000).

Keith and Herring (1991) compiled strong empirical evidence to support the belief that social stratification in the African-American community is best accounted for by the various skin tones existing within the race. Participants reflected on experiences and observations of perceived disparity of treatment of Blacks in the African-American community solely based on physical attributes. In their experiences, social status and privilege were often granted based on the hue or amount of pigmentation (or lack there of) of the skin. The perception was that the lighter the skin, the higher the social status, the more the privilege, the better the treatment by all of society.

The texture of the hair also figured prominently. In terms of physical attractiveness, the lighter the skin, and the more Eurocentric the texture of the hair, the more attractive the person was perceived as being. Educational background and economic status were also social indicators, dictating "Who was Who" in the African-American community. The "what is beautiful is good" stereotype has created a "halo effect" for light complexioned persons, meaning that regardless of their deeds and actions, they are

viewed as good just because of how they look. This covert message is seen in the experiences related by the study participants.

- Well, having studied it as an adult, I now know that people believed there are certain advantages to be acquired because of skin color. That if you were lighter, you'd hear the phrases like, If you light ,you're alright; if you're brown, hang around; if you're black, get back! I think there are certain advantages that people thought they had based on that.
- In our predominately-Black environment, color was the dividing line. Certain families would not even accept you if you weren't the right shade. My sister was very accepted. She was fair skinned and she was cultured. She was invited into certain social clubs that were color struck or money struck.
- When I was in high school, I was on the cheerleading team. It was an all Black school but every girl on the cheerleading team was light skinned with long hair or good hair. Teachers treated the girls who were fair skinned differently. They were gentler with them. They were more patient with them.

The participants shared experiences exemplifying the powerful and critical impact of family instilling a positive sense of self in a child, emotionally protecting them against negative encounters experienced in society. When armed with a positive sense of self that a good foundation provides, self-esteem does not easily waiver. Those participants, whose parents instilled in them a positive sense of self early in life, had the advantage of being insulated from the negativity encountered when interacting with society. In addition to the family and people encountered in society, there is yet another significant

entity affecting the participant's perceptions of beauty and that is the powerful influence of the media.

Media Influences

Who could argue the powerful effects of the media on the psyche of all Americans? We are continuously inundated with images of what we should walk like, talk like, smell like, act like, think like, and look like. The definition of physical beauty is subject to the hegemonic standards of a White male dominated society. We live in a culture where women are readily objectified with continuous pressure to obtain the "ideal" body (Hesse-Biber, 1996). Most of the imagery in the media is directed towards White women. While mediated images of beauty have become slightly more diverse in recent years, women of color have fewer images to compare themselves to (Dipaolo, 2001; Patton, 2006). For the most part, the beauty of the African-American female has been ignored or at best, underrepresented.

As with mainstream society, the participants in this study were exposed to media images that lacked ethnic diversity. Yet, they were able to identify with the select few images of African-American females available, leaving a lasting impression on them.

A few participants did not recall their earliest image of beauty as being a family member. They discovered their earliest image of beauty in the media, citing an African-American celebrity as the first persons they saw as attractive. The participants described these celebrities as positive images of beauty that were "reflections" of themselves. These particular participants identified with these celebrities based on their female gender and African-American heritage.

- I would say it was Dianne Carol who played a nurse in the television show Julia." She was one of the first "classy," African-American female characters seen on TV. I have fond, personal memories of the show and remember seeing her as glamorous, smart and professional."
- I would say the model Beverly Johnson. I saw her in magazines and stuff like that. I liked her skin color and the way she was able to play her features up with the color of makeup that she wore. I saw myself being about the same shade as her. I was just starting to use makeup so I kind of used her as a guide.
- The first person who comes to mind is Lena Horne. It happens that she was a friend of my mother's. They grew up together. Anyway, she was tall, lean and had beautiful features.....beautiful eyes, the most beautiful and very expressive eyes. She was always very well made up and well-coiffed.

As noted by Saltzberg and Chrisler (1997), beauty is defined and measured by the judgments of others. However, it is reasonable to say that the current standard of beauty in this country is a White, young slim, tall upper-class woman. The three most common standards of White beauty in the United States with regard to hair is that it should be 1)long, curly or wavy, not kinky, and preferably blond; 2) neatly styled and 3) feminine-looking and different from men's hair (Weitz, 2001). Only a few participants cited Caucasian women as their first images of beauty. They admitted to having some desire to "measure up" to those images, in spite of their genetically inherent differences. These women expressed strong admiration and a particular desire to emulate the hairstyles of these Caucasian figures in terms of length and texture but not necessarily color.

- When I was a child, I liked Cinderella, the cartoon. To me, people who were beautiful were typically thin, White women with long flowing blonde hair and red lips. That's what I grew up thinking beauty was.
- I'm like 5 years old and in kindergarten. My mother had this culottes outfit she wanted me to wear and I was like, "No, I don't want to wear that. I hate it!" She knew how much I liked Charlie's Angels, especially Farrah Fawcett. So, she was like Farrah Fawcett has one just like it. I was like, "Really?" And after that, I wanted to wear that outfit every day. I loved Farrah. To me, she was just beautiful...the hair number one and then her features, like the way her face is shaped. She was tough! I wanted to be just like her as a child. That's probably why I joined the Marine Corps. She always had that tough woman persona that I wanted but yet she was elegant and beautiful at the same time. I know that's where that came from.
- I remember when I was in 1st or 2nd grade. I was in Catholic school with all White kids. I would drape a long yellow or white bath towel over my hair; tuck it behind my ears and swinging it from side to side, pretending that I had long, blonde hair. Well, I don't know if I wanted it to be blonde but definitely, I wanted long, flowing hair like the White girls had in my class.

Participants who embraced African-American images of beauty in early childhood consistently maintained a more positive self-image throughout their early developmental stage continuing into adulthood. Conversely, participants who found Eurocentric images of beauty most appealing during early development were the same participants who had the most difficulty developing positive images of self in adulthood.

According to Greene (1994), "this culture idealizes the physical characteristics of White women and measures women of color against this arbitrary standard" (p.18). This can be especially damaging to the African-American female. The frequent media portrayal of the idealized African-American female usually consists of Eurocentric influences such as light skin color, light eyes, long straight or wavy hair texture, and Caucasian facial features. In contrast, images of darker skinned, African-American females with more Afrocentric features are often maternalized, portrayed as belligerent or devoid of sensual appeal (Brown, 1993; Russell, Wilson & Hall, 1992).

Most participants recognized the powerful influence the media has in putting forth images of beauty. The participants felt that the media particularly has a powerful influence over young, impressionable African-American females in terms of dictating what is considered desirable physical traits. Many of the participants reported that recognizing that the images portrayed in magazines are "enhanced" helped them to "not feel bad" about their physical appearance. Furthermore, other participants felt that the more the media portrays images that reflect African-American women as beautiful, the more the African-American women will see themselves as beautiful. Many African-American women have had to invent their own measures of beauty (Patton, 2006).

- Essence magazine totally revolutionized my life when I was in college. Just to see a magazine with all these black people on the cover with all these beauty and health tips just blew my mind. It was very validating and affirming.
- It's really brainwashing because the media defines what a beautiful woman looks like. This is how her face is supposed to look, this is what she should weigh, and

these are what her measurements should be. Anything outside of that is fat, undesirable, and unacceptable.

- The media influences our perceptions of what is attractive, just by portraying certain types of women as beautiful. I mean, look at the magazines; they're not going to put someone ugly on the cover, so that's what everybody strives for. That's the standard.
- We have different features and different body shapes, so it's a different standard of beauty. African-American women don't identify with those images. My Caucasian friends worry much more about being thin and looking like the images in the media than my African-American friends do. I think it's because most people in Hollywood presented as images of beauty are Caucasian.
- I think it true that beauty is in the eye of the beholder, but all too often, the beholder has been brainwashed by the media, which is controlled by White men.

There was full acknowledgement of the influence of the White male dominated media on the values and opinions of all exposed to the media be it in the format of television shows, movies, music videos, commercials, magazines, and all other forms of advertisement. The issue was the degree of variability for influence the media has in influencing their perceptions of beauty. For the women in this study, the greater their sense of self, the less influence the media had in terms of affecting their self-esteem and body image.

In summary, the three major dimensions identified having the most influence on the unformulated self in composing a definition of beauty was The Family, Society, and the Media. Each participant received both positive and negative messages from these

sources to varying degrees. The more positive the experiences, the more expansive and inclusive the perception of beauty was. The more negative the experiences and messages received from family, society and the media, the more rigid and limiting the perception of what is beautiful was. With this psychological picture of the image of beauty in tow, a psychological comparison takes place.

Feeling Flawed Versus Fitting In

For the most part, the participants began life as young children who felt good about themselves. When the external influences of family and society were predominantly positive, their self-esteem remained intact, regardless of the media influence. When the outside influences of family and society were negative, their sense of self was shaken. When then exposed to media influences, their self-esteem was further assaulted resulting in low self-esteem and/or a negative body image. In either case, the participants became fully aware, some more painfully aware than others, of the differences between her attributes and the attributes of others. This awareness of differences can create a psychological obstacle or "a fork in the road," creating the option of taking one of two paths as she continues the process of integrating her Afrocentric self-identity.

As the participant becomes aware of the differences between her physical characteristics and her idealized image of beauty, she begins to evaluate the degree of difference between the two perceptions. If she sees herself as "not too different" from her perception of beauty, there is a feeling of "Fitting In." She then engages in an action/ process and takes the path of accepting herself "As Is." The following excerpt reflects an example of a participant engaging in this psychological comparison process:

- I think I'm above average. I see myself in certain things in the media. I see myself in cartoons and in Disney characters like Bambi, Jasmine in Aladdin and the characters in the Lion King and even Lady and the Tramp. All of those characters have these doe-like eyes very similar to mine. I believe it goes back in our history of people who share that particular feature. I think that eye shape constitutes beauty in every race, because I've seen White women with that feature, I've seen Indian women with that feature, every race has that. Many celebrities who are perceived as "beautiful" have the same shape of the face as I do. They have high cheekbones. I think it also has to do with symmetry and proportion. Anything distorted, asymmetrical or disproportioned takes way from how beautiful you are.

For this participant, seeing a reflection of her physical attributes in the images and faces of people and animations considered beautiful, attractive, and appealing provides comforting reassurance that she is attractive. She says to herself, "if that's what people think is attractive, and I look just like that, then obviously, I'm attractive." This line of thinking is an obvious self- esteem booster. Contrarily, when the media images of beauty have features opposite that of the participants, where does this validation and acceptance come from?

Participants felt most validated and accepted about their physical appearance by men or romantic partners who compliment them. Validation by a romantic partner improved positive feelings about physical appearance. Experiencing validation was described as a way of seeing the self through the eyes of their lover. Conversely, invalidation by a romantic partner distorts or negatively affects self-perceptions of

physical attractiveness. In their opinions, "not saying anything at all was almost as invalidating as speaking negatively."

Many women engaged in the action/process of comparing themselves to their own perceptions of physical attractiveness, becoming aware of the differences, which then led them down the path of feeling that something was wrong with the way they looked. Their experiences were interpreted as "Feeling Flawed." These participants had a more "westernized" view of attractiveness and did not perceive themselves as a reflection of that mental image they had. The underlying message is that this feeling of not measuring up has negatively influenced their self-esteem with regard to self-acceptance as evident in the following passages:

- Physique wise, I'm not by any means a model shape, size, or height and that's something that I'm always struggling with. I'll never be a string bean. I know that by societal (i.e. Eurocentric) standards that I wouldn't be considered physically attractive or healthy.
- I've always been concerned about my body weight and my figure. I have thick thighs and hips. I've always wanted to be skinny like the little blonde girls I went to school with. I was always a minority and I was very, very sensitive about that. I wasn't concerned about my complexion or my hair. I was concerned about my body. I have natural Afrocentric curves as Black women do. I'm just not comfortable with my figure.
- When I was about nine years old, my Dad, who is Caucasian, took me to see Grease, starring Olivia Newton John. After the movie, he was like Ohhh, Olivia is just soooo beautiful! Of course, Olivia has blonde hair and blue eyes. It made me

> really sad to hear him say that he thought she was so beautiful. I thought to myself, well, I don't look anything like that, so he must think I'm ugly. That whole experience shattered my image of what I thought was beautiful. She became my definition of a beautiful woman at that very moment. I knew I could never look like her with blonde hair and blue eyes. After that, I started feeling ugly.

Becoming aware of the differences between themselves and the idealized images of beauty was a significantly common experience for the majority of the participants. The comparisons made and the feelings that resulted from making those comparisons were not haphazard or superficial. The concept of what is and is not considered physically attractive is deeply rooted in the psyche of the African-American people. As in greater society, when a person is considered physically attractive by African-American standards, self-esteem is boosted and is typically accompanied by the belief that more opportunities exist socially and economically. The perception that these types of advantages do not exist for those considered unattractive by African-American standards.

With few exceptions, overwhelming majorities of the participants cited the historical underpinnings of slavery as the origin of colorism and were quick to reflect upon the status and psychosocial dynamics of the field slave versus the house slave. "Lighter-skinned straighter-haired slaves "worked inside the plantation houses performing less backbreaking labor than the slaves relegated to the fields. Lighter complexioned slaves had better access to clothes, food, and the promise of freedom upon the master's death." (Patton, 2006, p.28). Most of the participants believed that this was

the beginning of how African-Americans were "pitted against each other" based on the hue and other physical attributes.

Many participants believed that historically, the lighter skinned slave, often the product of the White slave master and his Black slave, had an "easier" life on the plantation by being assigned to the house as opposed to the field. This dynamic was consistently identified by participants as the origins of skin color bias among African-Americans.

The term "brainwashed" was frequently used by the participants, referring to African-Americans adopting European standards of beauty in terms of defining physical attractiveness. Many participants felt that there is a general perception that African-Americans with light skin, light eyes, long hair, and Caucasian features are perceived as more attractive in this society. Participants cited multiple examples of African-Americans perceiving Eurocentric-like physical attributes as more attractive and more valued than Afrocentric physical attributes. It was believed that this mentality is a lasting result of African-Americans embracing a Eurocentric standard of beauty.

- I think my thing with light skin is that I guess it always bugged me that some Black people looked at girls that were super light skinned and felt they were attractive just based on that.
- I have a good friend back in Detroit. We used to go out a lot together and she was lighter complexioned. She was what people used to describe as high yellow or red boned. She was the same complexion as that singer, Chante' Moore. There would be a bunch of us that used to go out together and guys would just really, really, really find her attractive. I mean it's not like she wasn't attractive, but she didn't

look any better than the rest of us. Maybe there was something else other than her complexion, but it was disproportionate the way people responded to the rest of us in that group.

- During my dating years, I can remember that the women that I considered very unattractive thought they were attractive because they were light skinned. Yet they were extremely ugly. I mean they didn't have nice features because they were out of proportion with the rest of their face, yet they thought they were all that and a bag of chips because they were light skin. Men thought they were attractive because they were light skin, yet I didn't find them attractive at all.

One serendipitous finding was that many study participants with predominately-Eurocentric physical attributes may have given them a social advantage in terms of physical attractiveness but not in terms of social status. In fact, many of them saw it as a disadvantage. Their perception was that they have "never felt fully accepted" by other African-Americans and have always felt the need to "prove their blackness." They expressed feeling a sense of inferiority for not being "Black enough." They believed that they are often perceived as "thinking they are better" than dark complexioned African-Americans. These participants describe it as particularly distressful because the disparity was "coming from their own people." Although their physical attributes were considered more Eurocentric than Afrocentric, the reactions they encountered from other people in the African-American community, essentially resulted in them also "feeling flawed" as seen in the following excerpts:

- Growing up, I fought so hard to be Black, because so many people kept calling me "White girl," That was their way of making me feel bad, putting me down.
- Well, in my youth, I always felt that my skin tone wasn't dark enough. I wanted to be a little darker. People used to tease me about it all the time. Coming of age in the 60's when Black was Beautiful; if you were too light, you were called "high yella" and all those negative things. It was really hard to fit into the African-American community.

Participants of a medium to dark hue quite vocally expressed an ongoing frustration with the assumption that light skin is automatically equated with beauty, independent of any other physical characteristic. These same participants were equally disturbed by the perception that dark skin was all too often excluded from inclusion in the color spectrum of beauty, "even in this day and age."

- We are still hung up on color. The things that people still say amaze me. I had one student who was dark skinned, a beautiful girl and comments were made that, Wow, she is so pretty to be so dark", as if to say, Whoa, that's an exception to the rule to be dark and pretty."

Many participants believed that the issue of skin color bias in the African-American community is such a sensitive issue that it cannot be openly discussed or publicly confronted. Whether passively observed or directly experienced some participants were of the opinion that, "You just don't go there!" One participant expressed the following sentiments regarding the issue.

- As a light-skinned person, I never talked about skin color bias with dark skinned people. It's an unspoken thing , but you know that they know that it exists. They feel it. I've witnessed it. They just act like it didn't happen. I don't bring it up because I don't want to embarrass them. They don't want to bring it up because it's painful.

In conclusion, the participants revealed that insecurities about one's physical appearance can exist regardless of the person's physical attributes supporting the ever-popular notion that beauty is indeed in the eye of the beholder. When experiencing a psychological state of "feeling flawed" in the process of integrating the Afrocentric–self, the study participants responded in one of the following ways: Rejecting a Eurocentric Standard of Beauty, "Tipping the Scales," and Embracing a Eurocentric Standard of Beauty. Each action/process is discussed in the following sections.

Rejecting a Eurocentric Standard of Beauty

One of the three ways in which the participant sought to counteract "feeling flawed" was to reject the standard of beauty. The participants all described the typical All American Beauty as a Caucasian, 5'10 " tall, thin, with blonde-hair, blue eyes, large breast, slim hips and only slightly protruding buttocks. Armed with the perception that this image is the epitome of beauty in this society, some participants came to the realization that aspiring to be a reflection of that image was both unrealistic and unattainable. They responded by choosing the path of rejection of this narrowly defined image of beauty. It has been reported that many African-American women adopt a larger ideal body size, are more accepting of overweight body sizes, experience less social

pressure about weight, and are therefore more satisfied with their body image than White women (Streigel-Moore, Schreiber, Pike, Wilfley, & Rodin, 1995).

Some participants used their hair as a physical manifestation of the rejection of a Eurocentric standard of beauty. Wearing a natural hairstyle was a symbolic way of showing acceptance of their inherent physical characteristics and embracing Afrocentrism. Yet others made the conscious decision to wear their hair in a natural state for the style and ease of maintenance.

In many ways, the dynamics of Black hair parallel the issues of skin color in the African-American community. Study participants commonly revealed that loaded descriptions of hair texture are introduced early in life, often dictating and influencing overall perceptions of physical attractiveness. The length of the hair was also a factor in determining physical attractiveness for an African-American woman. The perception was that long hair is more beautiful and more attractive to African-American men, regardless of texture or hue of skin.

"Good Hair" was defined as hair that is more Eurocentric in texture, easy to manage, does not require heat or chemical processing to straighten and is an added bonus when combined with having light skin. "Bad Hair" was described as hair that is Afrocentric in texture, has a tight curl pattern making it "nappy" or "kinky" when in its natural or unprocessed state, is difficult to manage and is often painful to comb. As with skin color, many participants experienced or observed treatment by other related to hair texture. This treatment directly affected the self-esteem as seen in the following examples:

- Maybe what helped me with my self-esteem was to hear my aunt and my grandmother say, "Oh, you got good hair!" I had cousins whose hair wasn't like mine.
- I don't see kinky and nappy as the same. Nappy is bad. It means more than just your hair. When my mother said you were nappy headed, that meant that you just needed to go somewhere and sit down. It went further than just a physical description of your hair. It was like a verbal assault on your person.
- When I was a kid, my dad, who is White, started making fun of my hair. He'd shake his hair and say I couldn't shake mine the same way. He'd say you use all these products and no matter what you do, your hair never looks good. Then he would try to comb my hair. He was very brutal when he combed it. He'd use a fine toothed comb and all the teeth would fall out. He'd yank it so hard that I would scream and he'd comb over my hands and my scalp would be bleeding. It was horrible!

Having had these experiences, several participants made a conscious decision to wear their hair in a natural state as a reflection of self-acceptance and ethnic pride.

Deciding to "Rock the Locks"

Sisterlocks/Dreadlocks adorned the heads of many study participants. Having decided to wear this particular style, many women initially questioned if it was "professional enough" to wear in a work environment. While almost all of the participants like the look, style and convenience of this natural hairstyle, the concern was that "locks" are not glamorous, not dressy enough and questioned if they would be uncomfortable wearing them in their particular work environment. One participant still

doubts and questions her decision to wear Sisterlocks. She is considering running for public office and worries that they may not have a "crossover appeal." There were many reasons why these sisters made the decision to go natural as seen in the following examples:

- Oh, that was an easy decision. When I lived in DC, every other woman wore dreadlocks, and Sisterlocks. Those Black women just looked so beautiful and so together to me. They represented different professions like medicine, business, and the law. They were so impressive. Many Black women that were department chairs influenced me as well. I went from wearing an afro for 22 years to locks. Once I started growing them, they became my identity. They make you and you make them.
- I absolutely LOVE locked hair! I embrace the word "nappy." I am nappy by nature and natural by choice!!
- I've been wearing an Afro since the 60's. I came to the recognition that all my life I'd been told that what I had wasn't good enough. This hairstyle is just a manifestation of self. It's comfortable and it's me. Be it long or short, falling out or out stay in, whatever, it's MY hair. For me, it's an intellectual statement of my political position. For many other people it's just a style or a fad.

Many participants shared fond memories of the periodic Saturday morning ritual of getting their hair "washed and pressed." There were many recollections of singed ears and foreheads from hot combs and scalp burns from perms left on too long. Almost every participant had at least one story about "the bad perm that took all my hair out," all in the name of beauty.

Tired of the traditional heat and chemical straightening process used to maintain European influenced, African-American hairstyles, several participants made a conscious decision to free themselves and embrace a "natural" hairstyle as an expression of beauty. The participants described it as a liberating, freeing experience in that they no longer had to endure the time, expense and discomfort of altering their hair from it's natural state as well as increasing their sense of ethnic identity. However, in making this decision, there was some consideration of how well accepted they would be in a predominantly Caucasian work environment. Each woman ultimately decided to be true to herself and take the risk and was prepared to deal with the consequences.

- I'm older now and I started caring less and less about my hair being straight. I hated doing my hair, I hated rolling my hair, and it's a lot of trouble sleeping on rollers. I certainly was concerned about how I was going to be perceived by the mangers that are White men. I certainly had a concern about how they would see me. Ultimately, I decided to go with it and deal with whatever happens. Fortunately, it has not been a problem.

African-American women are blessed with the versatility of wearing many hairstyles. Some choose the go nappy, "locked", short, long, curly or straight, braided or weaved, teased, permed colored, dyed, fried, or laid to the side. No matter the style, our hair can be a reflection of who we are, what we have survived, how we feel about ourselves, and where we are on our journey to integration of our Afrocentric selves.

On a personal level, the African-American female may chose to dress Afrocentrically, or wear her hair in its natural state. Essentially, she creates her own standard of beauty, using her own yardstick by which she chooses to measure herself.

Another way in which the women in the study counteracted "feeling flawed" was to compensate by maximizing other non-physical attributes. By employing these strategies, the women found another way to boost their self-esteem and improve their feelings of self-worth.

"Tipping the Scales"

Several participants identified intelligence, athletics, and socioeconomic status as a way to "level the playing field" and to "make up for not having the physical characteristics that gave way to social privilege. In other words, though not perceived as one of the "pretty girls," some participants believed that they gained social acceptance by a single or combination of factors such as having intelligence, excelling in sports, or coming from an educated, highly respected, or well-to-do family. If you were seen as physically attractive as well as having these additional attributes, "the world was your oyster and you could write your own ticket." Conversely, not having any of these attributes sealed your fate as being ridiculed, unacknowledged, invisible, or abused by others.

- I was insecure about my looks so I really focused on schooling. I was the smartest Black girl in all my classes. So to me, that separated me from the pretty girls. Even though they were pretty, they were not as smart as me. It was my way of standing out.
- Where I grew up, people in Black society were treated differently, based on how they looked. Those who were seen as attractive got more attention than others. However, if you were smart, then you were treated pretty much the same as the attractive people.

- Nobody in the family was saying how pretty I was. I never felt that I was pretty. I felt I was smart. That was my thing. I had other cousins that were pretty but I was the smart one.
- When I was 13 or 14, I tried to be stylish and in the trend of what was and what was not fashionable. However, it really didn't matter what people thought about my face or my physical body, because I knew even then that I was beyond that. I knew that I had a certain insight into people's psyche and could communicate with them regardless of what I physically looked like, so that never mattered to me. I've always known that I could attract people with my mind.
- In college, I did decide to be at the top of the academic curve because that meant that my community had to acknowledge me. It was a way to get respect.
- I was always a very intelligent person. My sisters often teased me because I had a broad nose like my father. They'd say, you got a big nose like Daddy, and I'd say the better to breathe and go on about my business. I didn't have a lot of problems about how I looked because I always focused on how smart I was.

For these participants, intelligence "neutralized" beauty at the least and "trumped" it at best. They continued to value their level of intelligence as they matured and took comfort in knowing that "beauty is a superficial quality that soon fades" while intelligence is more enduring and sustaining. This does not mean that they have not come to appreciate their physical attributes. They have simply made a conscious decision not to value their appearance over their mental capabilities.

Another way the participants "tip the scales" in terms of feeling good about their bodies is be mindful of their perceptions of African-American male's attitudes regarding

body type preference. Most of the participants believed the average African-American male "prefers a woman with some meat on her bones." For African-American men, thin or skinny physique is not widely perceived as desirable. There is a strong preference for "curves" but it's clearly different from being fat or overweight. They prefer a "more voluptuous" figure on a woman. One participant described the ideal body type as medium sized breast, a small waist, thick thighs and "plenty of junk in her trunk"

- I think for the most part, Black men like curves, they call it being "thick," but they distinguish thick from "fat." They don't like skinny women so less pressure is on us in terms of trying to get skinny. That has kind of worked against us because a lot of Black women are overweight but they don't see themselves as overweight, they see themselves as "thick" or "fine". That's good for their self-esteem but not good from a health standpoint.
- The African-American standard of a good body is that you are "PHAT" meaning curves in all the right places. You're not flat or straight and the brothers have something to hold on to.

When asked who they believe are beautiful African-American females in our current society, there was no shortage of examples. Halle Berry was most often cited as "the most beautiful woman in the world – black, white, green, or purple!! Other noted African-American beauties include: Beyonce Knowles, Gabriel Union, Tyra Banks, Angela Bassett, Vanessa Williams, Toni Braxton, and Phylicia Rashaad.

In terms of appeal to the opposite sex, any of the participants believed that Black men have a natural affinity to the natural body type of the African-American female. They see the desired physique for Black women as very different from that of a

Caucasian woman. This belief helped to facilitate a sense of security and reassurance in that the specific physical attributes they possess are the very physical attributes that are desired by the men in their culture.

For these study participants, "tipping the scales" involved such actions as conscious activism in African-American culture through religious, social, community, and civic organizations, adopting an Afrocentric lifestyle such as wearing their hair in a natural, unprocessed state, dressing in ethnic attire, decorum in the home and becoming politically active regarding issues affecting the African-American community. Participants used these avenues as a way to promote positive feeling-worth and to embrace an Afrocentric identity.

Embracing a Eurocentric Standard of Beauty

Yet another way of addressing "feeling flawed" was to accept the westernized image of beauty by externally reflecting a Eurocentric style of hair, dress, and image. This sometimes entails suppressing the desire to fully embrace an Afrocentric identity. For most professional, affluent African-American women, this entails engaging in bi-culturalism, having the ability to effectively interact and negotiate between Eurocentrism and Afrocentrism. The challenge of achieving this balance can sometimes create a psychological dilemma as illustrated in the following examples:

- Well, I was tired of putting chemicals in my hair but I was worried about wearing it natural as a psychologist because I was afraid it wouldn't look professional.
- I loved wearing an Afro. If I could wear an Afro, again tomorrow, I would but I'm afraid I'd scare the people in my work environment to death. They'd think I'd flipped!!

- I would like to be more Afrocentric. I really, really, really would and I've been debating this for years and years because I've thought about wearing dreads for years, but I am not sure how my employers and teachers would perceive wearing dreads. I'm not sure I could advance if I had dreadlocks. I think some people would get the idea that I'm militant.
- I will probably wear Sisterlocks after I retire. I'm not sure if I could have advanced in my career the way that I have had I had my hair like that. I work for many older White men. They only see it as militant if worn by an African-American person. It makes more of a political statement in a corporate culture. We have a lot of power in our hair. Even straightening our hair is a political statement.
- Once I finish school and I am secure in my job I may decide to wear Sisterlocks. I think it would be a little bit more acceptable if I chose to work in academia. I think about people like Angela Davis and Alice Walker. I don't know about academia here in San Diego. They may not be ready for that.
- I like the locks but I don't think it gives you versatility. I don't think I could pull it off as an engineer. One day, I had an Afrocentric hairstyle and a British coworker said to me, "You don't have to wear an ethnic hairstyle. We know you're Black!" as if to say, you don't have to advertise it. So I'm kind of mindful of that.
- I absolutely want to fit in and I don't want people to be uncomfortable having me in meetings and things like that. I don't want to make other people uncomfortable also, I don't want to be uncomfortable because I think people are looking at me

and seeing me as not fitting into the corporate culture. I have to be able to deal with these folks and have respect for them and I did not want the way my hair looks and the way that I would be perceived by them to change. If they see me as changing or not fitting in, that's gonna affect my performance and how they view me and that affects upward mobility in the job.

- I'm thinking of running for political office and it makes me wonder if I could win a political office with my hair looking like this. I can't just have Black people voting for me, you have to have crossover appeal. Would white people vote for me if my hair looked ethnocentric like this.

Several of the participants expressed strong sentiment that "this is clearly the impact of cultural domination." What that says to them is that African-American women still feel the need to chemically or thermally straighten our hair as opposed to wearing it the way it grows out of our heads. The societal message they received is that "we must fit in with White America if we want to succeed in our careers." The more you look and act like the dominant culture, the more readily accepted you are by the dominant culture.

Conversely, one participant felt strongly that African-Americans do not have to submit to the value system of the dominant culture. She believes that the pressure is "self-inflicted." Here is her take on the issue.

- White people think we are militant anyway. Anybody Black who takes a stand for anything regardless of the color of their hair and how they wear it, White folks are gonna be scared of them no matter what. I think Black folks believe that there is some fear, Oh if I wear my hair like that, corporate America would have a problem. No, they wouldn't. You would have a problem. I've seen sisters with

> Afros all over the world and it doesn't seem to faze people one bit in terms of being frightened. There are too many people with hair like that who are in Congress. There are judges and all kinds of people who wear Afrocentric hairstyles. It doesn't matter. I think that's a convenience thing to say because people don't feel comfortable with themselves. I say that because we often create these things so it gives us license to do intellectually what we know we shouldn't be doing. Emotionally, we're still tied to the European standards.

There may be some substantial validity to this participant's statement. It is evident that there are participants in the study who have made a conscious decision to embrace Afrocentrism and who perceive themselves as not having suffered any repercussions because of their decision.

Some participants shared that their preference to chemically alter the natural states of their hair is not reflective of a desire to look more Caucasian. Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003) support this view asserting that straightening one's hair is not synonymous with whiteness or racial shame. It may simply be reflective of a desire to experiment or try on a new look by changing the color of the eyes with contact lenses. They concluded that an African-American woman could dye her brown tresses platinum blonde and still love her "Blackness."

In the final analysis, the participants felt that choosing to partially or fully embrace Afrocentrism or Eurocentrism is a personal decision that each individual woman has the right to make. Each person has the option of doing what is best for her, while respecting that others have the right to decide what is best for them.

The actions/processes of accepting self "as is, rejecting the standard of beauty, tipping the scales, and embracing the Eurocentric standard of beauty in the process of integrating the Afrocentric-self have all been discussed. Another salient dimension of framing and reframing reveals a proactive process of validating and reaffirming the self.

Framing and Reframing

During the framing/reframing phase, participants begin to reassess their thoughts, feelings, and perceptions about the standard of beauty, taking into consideration the larger context of the issue. They begin to "consider things from our point of view" rather than from the viewpoint of the dominant culture. They begin to "make sense of the world" in a new way with a new understanding and appreciation for who they are as an African-American woman, living in a white male dominated society.

Participants who felt most comfortable and accepting of their own physical attributes felt that this was accomplished by consciously rejecting the images of beauty thrust upon them by the media and by society and refusing to use that standard as the yardstick by which they should measure themselves. In a 20/20 interview, Essence Magazine editor, Susan Taylor, asserted that African-American women have not traditionally seen themselves represented in the media, so they create their own standard of beauty, thereby creating a wider range of beauty norms and more acceptance of different body types and weights (Patton, 2006; 20/20, 1998). The participants in this study also recognized that the images seen in the media are often retouched and are not a true reflection of what the person really looks like.

- I don't care much about what White folks think. That never fazed me.
- That's their [Whites] point of view.

- I fight against that standard and create my own standard that works for me!
- I have reconciled having a different standard of beauty.
- To compare yourself to a media image is a set up for failure.
- Those images are not real.
- As a psychologist, I understand human behavior so I understand where it comes from and in fact, instead of making me want to aspire to be like the standard it makes me sad that so many of my people aspire to do that. So, it gives me the opposite feeling.
- The older I get and the more I realize what's really going on, the more disgusted I get. My daughter and I were watching America's Top Model. They were talking about re-touching photos, and I told my daughter that you can never tell what a person really looks like from a photo. So, you can't go by what you see in a magazine. I'm so conscious of that. I bring that out for my children because I know they are influenced by that kind of thing.
- It's a lot of pressure. I know that. This country thrives off and sells a false image of beauty. It's just not real. Nobody really looks like that. No healthy person can be 5'10" and weigh 100 pounds. The things that they do to maintain that are insane. Models starve themselves and go on cocaine binges to decrease their appetite. All it's doing is making people like me crazy. It's such a sad cycle.

Finally, assisting in this process, the participants described an essential process of engaging actions such as connecting to other African-American women, exposing themselves to people and situations that bring about validation, consciously sustaining the positive attributes they currently possess, and seeing the path to self-discovery as a never-

ending journey. The women in the study insightfully conveyed that with age and maturity, they become more enlightened as they seek to become fully integrated with their Afrocentric selves. This was accomplished through the wisdom gained through the trials and tribulations they conquer as well as the victories and triumphs they celebrate. The following examples give voice to this experience:

- As I hit 30, I started to realize that as you get older, you start not caring what other people think. It's about what you need to get through life, to be the person that you want to be with people, friends, family, and what you want to be known for. You learn that you're not going to please everyone. You get to where you're OK with that!
- When you get over 50, nothing superficial matters anymore.. Hey, I might lose some weight, but even if I don't, life is good. As long as I'm healthy and I feel good about myself, whoever doesn't like it, get out my way, because at 57, I don't care. I am just glad to be alive and glad to have what I have, strut my stuff and move on!!
- I think older women have to share with other women how to be a woman. How to appreciate yourself, love yourself, and do things for yourself that enhances your internal beauty.
- I think it's a gradual thing. I don't think anybody wakes up and is instantly confident. There is always something that you want to change or wish it wasn't so, but I know that God created me and each of us is different and special. I think it's a continuous process based on the experiences you have in life.

- I had to put a new perspective on things. I just focus on my strengths. I may have strengths that another person doesn't have. I remind myself of Scriptures that say, "You're wonderfully made". I learned to work through my insecurities.
- What I discovered in my journey is that when I feel attractive, I attract others. So, when I am feeling good about myself, it emanates from me and others are attracted to me. When I'm not feeling good about myself, nobody looks at me. You give off a specific energy depending on how you feel.

The impact of constant exposure of a Eurocentric standard of beauty on the African-American female psyche is inarguably evidenced in the experiences these women have shared. Through sharing their experiences, the participants have provided a better understanding of the influences and processes involved in developing their own perceptions of beauty. In the final analysis, the consequence of the collective experiences and the actions/processes taking place to establish and maintain a sense positive of self is that of "Sustaining Ego-Strength Amidst Eurocentrism." More specifically, the participants identified the activities they engaged in to assist them in this endeavor.

Sustaining Ego-Strength Amidst Eurocentrism

Activities such as reading self-help books, studying African American-history, reading literature that addresses the issue from a historical perspective helped participants to understand the dynamics of Eurocentrism. Additionally, the participants were mindful that developing a positive self-image is a gradual and continuous process that has to continuously be nurtured and reinforced by self and others. This process should begin in childhood and should be reinforced by family. Integration to the Afrocentric self sometimes involves physical and psychological metamorphosis as the individual "learns

to love and accept myself unconditionally, more and more with each passing day." Integration of the Afrocentric-Self involved "keeping a check on my perceptions and not getting caught up in judging myself by the White standards of beauty." The consensus of these participants was that admittedly, "it is not an easy feat, but it can be done." These participants summed up the concept of Sustaining Ego-Strength Amidst Eurocentrism in the following statements:

- I've continued to broaden my perception of beauty. It's an ongoing, active process. If I can't embrace the beauty in my own culture, how can I expect others to? It's really hard to do because you're constantly getting messages of what is considered attractive. It's so easy to compare yourself, and others, to that yardstick. There are times when I rebel against that and say, Well, who says that's how you have to look? Who says this is what your waistline has to be to be considered attractive and I think that it's something that I will always struggle against living in this society. I think that the more you look like Halle Berry, the easier it is for you to feel attractive.
- I think what is beautiful is people who seem natural and comfortable in their own skin. Beauty is confidence. Self-esteem is a big part of it.
- I'm still shy at times. I don't have a whole lot of self-confidence. I sometimes have to work at showing confidence. I'm still working on it and I'm 62 years old. It's a continuous process and that's why it's so important to love each other and to share what I've learned with other women and to say, you know, you're not the only one and it's OK.

- Well, people in my close circle are not worried about what other people are thinking. We're not worried about what people look like or having a man. It feels really good to not be caught up in what others think. As a variety of people, we look differently, we dress differently, we act differently, but we are all very sure of ourselves.
- Our common thread is our spirituality. That has a lot to do with it. Seeing yourself in the eyes of God and not in the eyes of other people and knowing that God created you. He's happy with you. I think that has a lot to do with it, probably more so than anything else does. We are all on a spiritual journey that we are not looking at other people so much as we're looking at God.

Integration of the Afrocentric-Self is the central dimension that creates an understanding of how African-American females develop their perceptions of physical attractiveness in the context of a westernized (Eurocentric) standard of beauty. This central perspective was equally critical in understanding how the family, society, and the media influence the development of perceptions influence the self-esteem, and body image of the African-American female in the context of Eurocentrism and the pervasive legacies of slavery.

Summary

The findings of this study with these 17 college educated, African-American female participants are reflective of the complex dynamics involved in understanding how African-American females develop their perceptions of physical attractiveness in the context of a westernized (Eurocentric) standard of beauty. The results of this study have

also provided insight into understanding how the internalized perceptions of beauty influence the self-esteem, body image, and mental health state of the study participants.

Each participant began life as an African-American female, born into a male-dominated, Eurocentric society, a society with a deeply rooted legacy of physical and psychological enslavement of people of African descent. As she developed and matured, each participant was exposed to familial, societal and media influences that shaped her initial perceptions of beauty. Eventually, she consciously compared and contrasted her physical attributes with her perception of the standard of beauty. Varying degrees of Afrocentrism and Eurocentrism are then reflected in her personal choices of hairstyle, attire, social activities, lifestyle, psyche, and overall persona.

For African-American women, beauty encompasses more than what is merely seen with the human eye. The beauty of an African-American woman is defined by the total essence of her being in mind, body, spirit, and soul. Self-appreciation of her beauty is an individual, life-long process with many tribulations and triumphs along the way.

As this dynamic process continues throughout her life span, she encounters experiences that both buttress and deflate her self-esteem. Spurred by the wisdom of the ages, she is often able to meet the ongoing challenge of sustaining a strong sense of ethnic identity in a society that provides so little validation. It is during these times that she experiences a feeling of integration, beholding the beauty of her Afrocentric-Self.

Reflections on Conducting Black Feminist Research

The beauty of feminist standpoint theory is that it focuses on how the circumstances and culture of one's life influences one's perspectives, values, and beliefs. Further, it examines how gender, race, and class influence social positioning. Feminist

standpoint seeks to expose both acts of oppression and acts of resistance by asking disenfranchised persons to describe and discuss their experiences with hope that their knowledge will reveal otherwise unexposed aspects of the social order. It allows one to see the diversity among Black women in terms of body image, body size, hair and skin color because the focus is on valuing the personal experience, allowing one to name and define her experiences. (Allen, Orbe & Olivas, 1999).

Conducting this relevant, grounded theory study from a Black Feminist standpoint provided an opportunity to explore the lives of these African-American women by an African-American woman. The self-defined standpoint shared by each participant was valid knowledge because it was a true expression of her experiences. Each participant shared "her truth," and the "truth" of her experience is "knowledge" that is "valid" because "she" says it is "valid" in the contextual experiences of her life. Engaging in this process provided the women in this study an opportunity to cultivate and value their view of themselves and their world. Conducting this research from a Black feminist perspective provided an avenue for these participants to share their experiences of racism, sexism, and classism within the context of American society and to surface how they resist this oppression.

As the researcher, having the freedom of sharing and reflecting on my own similar experiences was extremely empowering. This was truly a liberating and delightful investigative experience. The self–knowledge and enlightenment gained have proved invaluable. This research endeavor has been a true labor of love. A complex, multi-dimensional way of knowing has been generated, through the voices of these the research participants. The application of this new understanding is beneficial to the nurse

researcher/clinician, African-American women, the mental health community, and society at large.

Chapter 5

Implications and Recommendations

This study examined the development of perceptions of physical attractiveness of African-American women socialized within a culture that embraces a standard of beauty inherently different from their natural, ethnic physical attributes. Their perceptions of their experiences exemplify how deeply ingrained colorism and Eurocentric values are in this society. The study provided insight into the way in which family, societal and media influences influence the development of their perceptions of physical attractiveness. This chapter discusses the implications of the study with regard to how mental health clinicians can play an integral role in assisting African-American women in the process of liberating themselves from the oppressive constraints of hegemonic European definitions of physical beauty. Recommendations for future studies are also included in this chapter.

Critique of the Study

The results of this qualitative research study provides the mental health clinician with a deeper understanding of some of the key factors influencing the development of the self- esteem and body image of the African-American female. Direct benefits of this study are useful to nursing is in that the knowledge gained was used to generate a theoretical understanding of how the African-American female's perceptions of physical attractiveness develop and influence her self-esteem. The increased awareness and understanding of this phenomenon is of mutual benefit to this nurse researcher, other psychiatric nurse clinicians and ultimately the African-American female client. Findings

from this study add to the limited body of nursing research regarding how the African-American female's perceptions of physical attractiveness develop and influence her self-esteem. Mental health practitioners from the disciplines of medicine, social work, psychology, and psychiatry can also benefit from the findings of this and future studies regarding how the African-American female's perceptions of physical attractiveness develop and influence her self-esteem. Finally, the substantive beginning theory generated from this study lays the groundwork for future studies that continue to explore the relationship between self- perceived physical attractiveness, self-esteem, body image, and health care behaviors of the African-American female, which are such cogent issues among African-Americans.

Clinical Implications

The African-American woman often deals with the ever-present pressure to meet a beauty standard that is inauthentic and often unattainable. The desire to change her outer appearance to meet a Eurocentric ideal or dissatisfaction with her physical appearance may lead to self-loathing (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003). Many African-American women who are dealing with self-esteem and body image disturbances seek emotional healing and a sense of empowerment from the mental health care system. Therefore, the inclusion of cultural considerations, when counseling the African-American female plays a significant role in providing competent mental health care. As stated by Williams (2005), "an essential feature of psychotherapy with African-American women who are struggling to maintain a sense of wholeness in an oppressive cultural environment is helping them to separate what is personal from what is contextual and to understand how social constructs are internalized by individuals" (p. 83). The

results of this study shed light on the ways in which Eurocentrism and the legacies of slavery contribute to the oppressive cultural environment in which African-American females exist. The African American female often internalizes these social constructs, and ultimately engages in a lifetime process of integrating and beholding the beauty of the Afrocentric self.

In the clinical setting, the mental health clinician constantly generates data during the course of the therapeutic process. A collaborative problem-solving partnership exists between the therapist and the client. The clinician imparts interventions and action is taken or not taken by the client. The therapeutic goal drives the desired clinical outcome.

One commonly used therapeutic approach is Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT). The basic premise of cognitive behavioral therapy is that thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are inter-related. The identification of core beliefs is an integral part of CBT. Core beliefs are deeply rooted ideas about the self, other people and the world, thus generating both positive and negative thoughts.

In CBT, the clinician helps the client change negative thoughts into positive thoughts. Positive feelings then emerge from positive thoughts. Positive thoughts and feelings result in positive behavioral changes. When counseling a woman of African-American decent, the historical, psychosocial, and sociopolitical context, which shaped her core beliefs, should be carefully examined. Consideration should be given to the possibility that she experiences a different world than that of mainstream America.

For example, a 24-year-old, single African-American female enters into cognitive behavioral therapy for the treatment of clinical depression. She is depressed because she is unhappy with her current job as a waitress; she is unhappy in her romantic

relationships and often feels unappreciated. Through the cognitive behavioral therapy process, the clinician determines that she has the following core beliefs: Based on what she has been told by her family peers as well as what she has seen on television, she concludes that "My nose is too big, I'm too dark. No man could ever really love me." She has also decided that "College is for rich, White people. I'm not rich and I'm not White, so college is out of the question." These core beliefs are the foundation for her feelings of inadequacy and insecurity and have contributed to her "feeling flawed." Her core beliefs have resulted in a disturbance of self-esteem in terms of her physical appearance and intellect. Because of these self-deprecating thoughts and feelings that she can never be more than what she currently is, she has engaged in unhealthy behaviors such as frequent absenteeism from work, subjecting herself to emotionally abusive relationships, and using alcohol to "forget" about her problems. Through the process of cognitive behavioral therapy, the clinician would supportively work to challenge and change the core beliefs she holds about herself and the world in which she lives. She would be encouraged to find ways to validate, affirm and appreciate her internal and external beauty. She may be given a homework assignment to cut out images of attractive African-American celebrities with her same complexion.

To reframe her core beliefs about college, the therapist would expose her to college educated African-American-females and perhaps suggest that she find a mentor. She may encourage her to visit a college campus to observe an ethnically diverse student population. By changing her thoughts that the opportunity for a college education is possible, her feelings change from feeling inadequate and powerless to feeling capable and empowered. With a new vision she has created for herself, she takes the necessary

steps to enroll in the college of her choice. As a result of these clinical interventions, she has improved her self-esteem concerning her feelings about her physical appearance as reflected in a change to a stylish change of attire, grooming, body language, and demeanor. Making the Dean's List that first semester would be a reflection of her improved self-esteem with regard to her intellect. She may later join an African-American sorority on campus, which would allow her to connect to other African-American females who could provide validation, affirmation, and mentoring.

Limitations of the Study

One of the main limitations of the study is the fact that all of the participants were college educated, affluent African-American women who have successfully conquered the challenge of living in a westernized culture. Certainly, their lives are not perfect or without challenges, but these women are all competent, capable, and accomplished and feel good about who they are and what they have experienced. However, several questions remain. What are the experiences of African-American women who are not college-educated or accomplished by societal standards? What are the similarities and differences in their journeys of college-educated and non-college educated African American women socialized in the United States? Are the outside influences the same and if so, to what end? The women in this study were all very high functioning, emotionally stable, and were not involved in the mental health care system. What about the African-American woman who is "feeling flawed" and has not found an effective or healthy way to counteract the negative influences shaping her core beliefs? The model does not provide and answer to this scenario.

Indications for Future Research

Studies with African-American women with more diverse backgrounds should be conducted. Studies with African-American women actively involved in the mental health care system, who are being treated for depression, self-esteem disturbances, and/or substance abuse disorders should also be conducted.

This research is an initial endeavor involving a select group of women. Expanding the participants to include other women of color living in the United States of America would provide valuable information about the development of self-perceived physical attractiveness from a different perspective. It would also be valuable to conduct the study with Caucasian women for comparison purposes to see how their experiences differ from those of African-American women and other women of color. Conducting a study with African-American males to see how their perceptions of physical attractiveness would be valuable in contributing to their role in buttressing or undermining the self-perceptions of beauty of African-American women and in identifying areas for psychological interventions.

In the spirit of Black Feminist Philosophy, it has been an honor and a privilege to share in the personal life experiences of each of my beloved sisters. Conducting this research has also resulted in an introspective reflection of my process of integration and beholding the beauty of my own Afrocentric-self. As my sisters have so beautifully articulated, it is a life long process that is not without peaks and valleys, but certainly nonetheless, very worthwhile.

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Appendix B

Agency Approval Letter

Date
Name of Agency
Address
San Diego, CA

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter is to request your assistance in posting a flyer at your facility to recruit volunteers for my dissertation project. The purpose of the flyer is to seek prospective participants for a study on African-American female's self-perceptions of beauty. With your permission, I would like to post the flyer at your location during the week of June 7, 2004. I have attached a sample copy of the flyer that will be used for recruiting volunteers for the study.

Approval for this study can be confirmed with Dr. Jane Georges, Hahn School of Nursing, of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of San Diego, 5998 Alcalá Park, San Diego, CA 92110-2492 or by calling Dr. Georges at (619) 260-4548.

I would appreciate your approval to post the flyer by signing below and faxing the letter back to me at 619-482-8964 at your earliest convenience. If you have further questions or wish to contact me, I can be reached at 619-254-8964. Thank you again for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Donna L. Cook, CCNS, MSN, RN

Yes, Donna L. Cook has my permission to post a flyer at this location in order to recruit participants for her dissertation project.

_____
Signature

_____
Title

_____
Date

Appendix C

Recruitment Flyer

CALLING ALL SISTAHS!!!!

Your participation is needed in a research project about how African-American women's perceptions of physical attractiveness develop in a westernized society. It involves a one-hour confidential interview with Donna L. Cook, a doctoral student at the University of San Diego, San Diego, CA.

The interview will be conducted at a time and location of your convenience.

Please Call:

Donna L. Cook at 619-254-8964

Appendix D

Participant Consent Form

Self-Perceived Beauty of the African-American-Female

You have been asked by Ms. Donna L. Cook to be interviewed for a doctoral dissertation study on the process by which African-American women develop self-perceptions of beauty in the United States of America. Ms. Cook is a doctoral candidate from the University of San Diego, San Diego, CA. Dr. Sharon McGuire is the Faculty Advisor for this study.

You understand that the interview will take 1 to 2 hours to complete and will be conducted in at a place and time that is convenient to me. With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded.

You understand that your name will not be used, and a code name will be assigned to you. All of your information is strictly confidential and will be locked up at the home of the researcher. Only the researcher will have access to your information. You further understand that the information will be kept for at least 5 years and that findings will be reported in such a way that your identity will not be revealed.

You understand that there are minimal risks to your participation in this study other than possibly being uncomfortable with some of the questions asked. You understand that you can choose to not answer any question you are not comfortable answering at any time.

Should you experience psychological distress during or immediately following the interview, Donna L. Cook will briefly provide you with psychological support. If it is evident that you are in need of further psychological assistance, you will be provided with referral information for a licensed mental health professional.

Results of this study may be published and/or presented, but your identity will never be revealed. Upon request, you can receive a summary of this research upon its completion.

You have received a copy of this form. There is no agreement, written or verbal, beyond that expressed in this form.

You understand that you may quit the study at any time without any negative consequences. You understand that you may ask questions before signing this consent form and that you can contact Donna L. Cook at 619-254-8964 or her Faculty Advisor, Dr. Sharon McGuire at 619-260-4845 about any questions or concerns you have about the study.

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understand the information above on this consent form and that you give consent to voluntarily participate in this study.

Participant	Date	Donna L. Cook, Researcher	Date

Appendix E

Demographic Questionnaire

Code:_____

Date of Birth:_____ **Age:**_____ **Marital Status**_____

Number of Children: _____ **Level of Education:** _____

Occupation:_____

Employed: { } Yes { }No { } Retired

Income Category (Gross household yearly income)

{ } up to $20,000 { } $40,000 to $50,000 { } $70,000 to $80,000

{ } $20,000 to $30,000 { } $50,000 to $60,000 { } $80,000 to $90,000

{ } $30,000 to $40,000 { } $60,000 to $70,000 { } $90,000 to 100,000

{ } Over $100,000

Where were you born? _____

Where were you raised? _____

Where were your parents raised?

Mother _____ Father_____