SMITH COLLEGE

Theses, Dissertations, and Projects

2015

Self-love or self-obsession? : a comparative theoretical analysis of Black women's natural hair selfies on social media

Rachael E. Gardiner
Smith College

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.smith.edu/theses

Part of the Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons

Recommended Citation

Rachael Elizabeth Gardiner
Self-Love or Self-Obsession?
A Comparative Theoretical
Analysis of Black Women's
Natural Hair Selfies on Social
Media

ABSTRACT

Whether selfies and use of social media is indicative of rising trends in narcissism in American culture is a ripe debate in academic and popular culture. This theoretical thesis will examine current research on social media usage and narcissism, and consider how aspects of culture, historical, and structural racism complicate understanding of the current trend. This project will consider how oppression of Black women's bodies and perpetuation of European standards of beauty in American culture negatively impacts Black women's self-perception, particularly in relation to their hair. Due to ongoing negative perception and attempts to control Black women's bodies through their hair, this paper will utilize two theoretical frameworks—Black Feminist Theory and Self psychology—to provide insight into the ways in which use of social media and selfies may provide space as a site of resistance, creation of a collective voice, a safe space, and/or a place to obtain community and affirmation. This paper will explore alternative ways to appreciate selfies, adding a historical framework and cultural competency lens to the discussion.

SELF-LOVE OR SELF-OBSESSION? A COMPARATIVE THEORETICAL

ANALYSIS OF BLACK WOMEN'S NATURAL HAIR SELFIES ON SOCIAL

MEDIA

A project based upon an investigation,
submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of
Social Work.

Rachael Elizabeth Gardiner

Smith College School for Social Work
Northampton, MA 01063

2015

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

Introduction

i just recently decided to go natural. and i loooove the big hair selfies. they are

truly inspiring as i'm transitioning. they help me see the versatility and

specialness and uniqueness of every head of hair. it helps me appreciate the

different expressions and see far beyond the only image of beauty i'd known,

which was straight hair. i do believe the selfie fad with play itself out. but for

now, i'm loving it!!! (i must add that before going natural i hated taking selfies of

myself. but since then, I have a renewed sense of empowerment and self-esteem.

and the community has been uber supportive!) (Malaika, 2014, Comment section,

para. 1)

You're walking down the street or sitting on the subway and you see the phenomenon in

action—a person whips out their phone, turns the camera towards themselves, poses their body

and snaps a "selfie." [1] Nowadays people unabashedly take photos—or selfies— at any time or

place (and sometimes even with a selfie stick—*i.e.,* an extended handle that attaches to a smart

phone, enabling the userto take a selfie from a distance). Selfies are taken while walking down

the aisle, in scant clothing, during funeral services, or even during presidential inaugurations.

The decision to constantly document our lives from the special event to mundane daily activity is

---

[1] Oxford Dictionary defines selfies as, "[a] photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically

one taken with a smartphone or webcam and shared via social media" (OxfordDictionary.com,

2014).

raising concern among scholars and researchers in multiple academic fields. Academics and researchers posit: are Americans crossing a line from increased individualism into a narcissistic epidemic? Is the constant desire to document one's life a healthy form of narcissism or is it pathological?

Most news coverage and academic research on selfies focuses on negative implications of social media usage and selfie culture. However, selfies may not just indicate increasing negative attributes in American society, it may also have positive attributes. The phenomenon to be explored in this thesis is Black women's use of social media, primarily Facebook and Instagram, to post selfies of their natural hair process. As this phenomenon is relatively new, little research has been conducted examining this issue, and most research focuses on how selfies, regardless of its content, indicate an increasing amount of narcissism in American culture. Currently on social media platforms, are vibrant natural hair care forums (which some term "communities" or even "movements") providing space for Black women to receive support and positive affirmation in their process of learning and exploring their natural hair. For individuals who may consider posting of natural hair selfies as a political statement, these online spaces celebrate self-love. Spaces such as social media forums help rebrand natural hair as beautiful and go against mainstream American culture, which has forced Black women since slavery to mirror Eurocentric standards of beauty sometimes as a means to gain economic status and upward mobility in society. Thus, although much of the conversation on selfies is regarding a concern around increased narcissism in American culture, this thesis in examining the above-stated phenomenon will explore the possibility that selfies posted on Instagram or Facebook give space and voice to marginalized and oppressed communities. This thesis will work through two theoretical frameworks, Black feminist theory and self psychology, to explore the importance of

superimposing additional critical lenses to the conversation of selfies and narcissism; the ways in which an individual's behavior might be misinterpreted absent a cultural competency and historical/structural racism framework in considering possible reasons behind the use of tools such as selfies and social media.

Social Networking Sites

Popular social networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter, provide a platform for public display of connection and provide opportunities for individuals to receive social support and socially identify with others who share similar interests (Paul & Brier, 2001; Pembek et al., 2009; Zhao et al., 2008) In addition to these popular social media forums, Instagram was created in October 2010 after the iPhone 4 was released and is currently one of the most popular social networking sites. Instagram is a photo-sharing application where people upload photos from their lives as a means to exchange and interact with people all over the world. Instagram and Facebook similarly allow users to upload photos and use hashtags to link their photos to different photostreams.[2] Typically, individuals use hashtags as a tool to attach their image to a particular topic or community, generate likes, or increase amount of followers within Instagram. Hashtags thus allow photos to become part of the photo itself, influencing the storytelling based on the users categorization(s) of the photo. Individuals may choose to be more passive in their usage, engaging solely as a consumer of content (*e.g.,* reading posts, viewing pictures, selecting photostreams to "follow") or be a more active user where by creating content (*e.g.,* status updates, posting pictures, liking other posts and/or pictures, commenting, etc.).

---

[2] A hashtag is "a word or phrase preceded by a hash or pound sign (#) and used to identify messages on a specific topic" (OxfordDictionary.com, 2014))

These social media sites have created a new platform to constantly document one's life and record, define, or reconceptualize one's "self." Instagram may not just be a way to produce images but also an active means for individuals to establish their identity (Wendt, 2014). Astoundingly, Instagram has 200 million active users monthly, 20 billion photos shared, 1.6 billion "likes" daily for all photos uploaded, and averages 60 million photos per day globally (Instagram Press, 2014). Moreover, with such astounding statistics in Instagram alone, it does not come as a shock to discover that social media has sparked a new trend of sharing oneself as a visual medium in the form of selfies. Although it appears that the benefit of Instagram or Facebook is simply to post the selfie and receive feedback, some artists transform multiple selfies into a study of a particular phase of life (akin to a photographic journal), use the medium to expose struggling with a particular disease or attempt to shed light on certain marginalized identities.

A Narcissistic Epidemic?

One fundamental question in the quest to understand the current obsession with selfies is: when did we become so consumed with documenting our lives? Is it healthy? Is this specific to the United States or a particular subset of the population? Is this a passing phase or a permanent fixture? Many might say the selfie obsession began with the creation of the front-facing camera. In 2010, the iPhone 4 came out with a camera that allowed individuals to take pictures of themselves, thus beginning the emergence of the selfie that quickly went viral. The highly controversial selfie raises questions about vanity, entitlement, superiority, and obsessions with beauty and body image. The selfie craze may be a pathological narcissistic preoccupation with the self, a teenager's virtual rite of passage, a visual diary, a technique to participate in a civil rights movement, or a form of radical self-expression. At a minimum, a consistent theme in selfie

culture is the exploration and desire to receive affirmation of one's self-presentation and self-identity. Regardless of the selfie lifespan, the increasing obsession with individuality in the United States forces academia and pop culture alike to examine the phenomenon as research shows use of social media impacts one's mental health.

Research on use of social media includes examining issues of narcissism, self-esteem, objectification, cultural differences, age and other factors with multiple findings and sometimes conflicting results. To some, the selfie is the ultimate symbol of a narcissistic age in American culture (Twenge & Campbell, 2009). Press has advanced the notion that social networking sites ("SNSs") and narcissism are tightly linked (Davenport, Bergman, Bergman, & Fearrington, 2014), raising concern that usage of technology may have negative impacts and/or rate of usage may expose undiagnosed mental illness in consumers (Barker, 2012; Forest & Wood, 2012; Tazghini & Siedlecki, 2013). Media portrayals of selfie use imply many Americans are increasingly suffering from narcissistic personality disorder; however, prevalence of the disorder in community samples ranges minimally from 0-6.2%; however, it is unknown whether these numbers will increase (Dhawan, Kunik, Oldham, & Coverdale, 2010). Some research has found that female college users who base their self-worth on their appearances tend to share more photos on social networking sites than men (Stefanoe, Lackaff, & Rosen, 2011; Haferkamp, Eimler, Papadakis, & Kruck, 2012). Thus, many psychologists are particularly interested in assessing whether narcissistic tendencies in connection with social media usage are increasing in university age individuals and what the potentially negative effects on self-esteem may be, particularly for women (Donnellan, Trzesniewski, & Robins, 2009; Krämer, & Winter, 2008; Mehdizadeh, 2010; Twenge & Foster, 2008; Twenge, Miller, & Campbell, 2014). In the past few years, much of the research has focused on use of Facebook; however, Facebook use,

particularly among teenagers, has declined from 42% to 23% in just a year and a half, whereas Instagram usage has nearly tripled (Wissink, Marsh, Regan, Munster, Murphy, Naughton, Olson, & Tamminga, 2014); therefore, research is needed specifically to examine effects of using Instagram and other forms of social media.

As media psychology and research on the effects of social media usage is still in its infantile stages, little information is known about reasons underlying the use of social media, how it impacts people's lives, how it may or may not have developmental impact on adolescents. Much of the empirical research thus far focuses on adverse effects of social media use, particularly around self-esteem (Forest & Wood, 2012; Gabriel, 2014; Krämer & Winter, 2008; Lin & Lu, 2011). Some research findings show increases in self-esteem following online chat sessions and mitigation of perceived feelings of loneliness and depression with increases in online interaction (Bargh & McKenna, 2004; Shaw & Grant, 2002). Another study found university students with lower self-esteem gained more from Facebook use in bridging social capital (*e.g.,* having large networks of friends with weak ties), which is beneficial for individuals during times of transition (*e.g.,* moving to college, moving away from home) (Steinfield, Ellison, & Lampe, 2008). Regardless, there appears to be a lack of conversation in academic literature about possible benefits in posting of selfies, or ways social media could be used as a therapeutic tool for clinicians. Recent research indicates that cultural background and values influence self-presentation online (Kim & Papacharissi, 2013); however, research lacks in specifically exploring how differences in culture impact use of social media as well as meaning-making in the ways social media is utilized. As the field of research is quickly expanding, it is certain that over the course of time, more interest will develop in understanding the implications of social media usage and whether there are ways to incorporate social media into clinical practice.

A Short History of Narcissism: The Obsession with Self

Since the 19th Century, Americans have been obsessed and curious about narcissism. The concept of narcissism originates in the Greek myth of Narcissus. According to the myth, Narcissus fell in love with his own reflection, not realizing it was merely an image reflected in a pool of water. The story follows that Narcissus died because he was unable to detach himself from his fixation with his reflection. Since then, narcissism has become a commonplace term and tends to be understood as "an interest in or concern with the self along a broad continuum, from healthy to pathological ... including such concepts as self-esteem, self-system, self-representation, and true or false self "(Ronningstam, 2000, p. 53).

In 1913, Freud hypothesized that narcissism was an emotional state where one's sexual energy is directed towards one's self rather than towards an external object (Freud, 1914). He theorized there were two forms of narcissism—*primary* (normative narcissism) and *secondary* (pathological narcissism) (Freud, 1914). Freud considered primary narcissism as part of a child's normative ego development, where 'loving oneself' was a natural impulse to nourish and protect ourselves, and this natural impulse was inextricably bound with sexual desires (Freud, 1914). However, Freud further theorized, that where the sexual libidinal drive becomes overly directed toward the self (rather than toward an external object), it then may become the secondary (or pathological) form of narcissism, making individuals unable to relate to others (Freud, 1914; Fonagy, Person, & Sandler, 2012). The expectation, from Freud's perspective, was that healthy development occurred where self-love was transferred to an external object (Freud, 1914).

Heinz Kohut disagreed with Freud's conception of narcissism and took an entirely different approach. Instead, Kohut postulated that individuals have a three-part self that can only

develop when one's needs (including one's sense of self- worth) are met in relation to others (Kohut, 1971). He believed that every child tends to have a grandiose sense of self during development, which through maturing, transforms into healthy self-esteem. Kohut theorized that part of a child's healthy development required having caregivers who could provide a strong and protective presence with which the child could identify, reinforcing the child's growing sense of self by mirroring his/her/their good qualities. Thus, if the caregiver failed to provide adequate care to the child, the child would develop a brittle and flawed sense of self (Kohut, 1971). Kohut believed that Narcissistic Personality Disorder developed primarily out of childhood trauma when the trauma would disrupt the natural maturation process. Kohut further theorized that all infants have self-object needs that are retained in adulthood, and when self-object needs are not met, the infantile self-object needs maintain a rigid structure, potentially resulting in pathological narcissism (Berzoff, Melano, Flanagan, & Hertz, 2002). Kohut believed that narcissism existed on a spectrum—from healthy to pathological—and on the healthy side of the spectrum, narcissism was an expected part of development, one that was fundamental to the creation of a cohesive self.

Research Gaps and Implications for Social Work

Social workers in clinical practice are frequently required to diagnose individuals. The tendency to over-diagnose or unintentionally misdiagnose is a reality, and may occur frequently when clinicians do not incorporate a cultural competency and framework of structural and historical racism to help increase one's understand of the complexity of an individual's behaviors and understanding of the person-in-environment. Many of the classic and modern psychoanalytic theoretical approaches lack incorporation of a cultural competency or cultural humility lens as a fundamental tenet of the theory.

This paper explores our responsibility as clinical social workers to critically reflect upon the ways in which we conceptualize our client's choices, behaviors and ways to heal. It also serves to explore when and how we decide to define whether our client's patterns of behavior qualify as pathological, maladaptive, or otherwise. Due to lack of research from academic studies of Black women's social media usage regarding hair and its implications, it is the intent of this study to provide a starting point to shed light on ways in which use of social media such as Instagram or Facebook to post selfies may provide positive support systems for clients. Furthermore, this study intends to explore ways in which social media might be utilized as a therapeutic tool and provide alternative rationales for behavioral patterns that include a historical and cultural competency lens.

As applications such as Instagram are currently a highly popular form of social media with potentially positive implications for use in therapeutic settings, more empirical and theoretical research is needed to explore the potential benefits in its usage. Premature judgments or misperceptions of social media usage may distort a clinician's understanding of an individual and miss an important opportunity to incorporate conversations of structural and historical racism, obtain more accurate clinical insight, and explore topics such as self-esteem and self-love in session. Instagram may offer a wealth of beneficial outcomes: providing a forum for marginalized individuals to access others who serve as positive role models; a space to explore one's true inner self; and generating community when contact with like-minded individuals is difficult to access outside social networking sites. In a recent study examining the implications of Black women's participation in the natural hair care community, one of Moore's participants gave her explanation of reasons she engages in the natural hair community through social media:

I think we need to keep hearing our journey, so we can normalize our hair. You

know? And not, and I'm not saying that we are the ones that made it not normal,

because I think that's not true. I think that we participated in it, but I don't think

that we were the impetus for it not being normal. But I think I'm kind of tired

with the 'Omg, look at your locs!', you know, I want it to be like, you know, in

your face all of the time. And I feel like that's what's happening, to be honest

with you.... And the reason that I'm excited about it is...it's because of what I

know has to do with this love of self. So much of our own internalized racism and

the stuff that we sort of walk around with partly is, of course, laid up with how

we, the relationship we have with our own natural hair. And I'm not saying that

folks that have straight hair can't feel that way. ...I'm just saying that it's

important to have that relationship at least once in your life. (Moore, 2013, p. 21)

Methodology

This thesis will provide an overview of the phenomenon—the scope of use of Instagram

and Facebook to post selfies of Black women's natural hair process, the historical underpinnings

related to the importance of hair in the Black community, and a broad discussion of increasing

concern over use of social media and posting of selfies as an indication of a growing rate of

narcissism in the American population. The following two chapters will discuss Black Feminist

and self psychology theories. The thesis will conclude with a discussion chapter that synthesizes

all of the material presented and provide implications for clinical interventions. The concepts

discussed within the theoretical chapters are as follows.

Black Feminist Theory

Black Feminist Theory was selected as it will support and deepen the analysis of the selfie phenomenon and provide context to historical and political factors specific to Black women in America that should be considered at the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural levels. It is important to include theory that is culturally relevant to the phenomenon and provides a distinct voice in exploring concepts of intersectionality, different forms of oppression specific to Black women, the ways in which Black women have internalized their experience of oppression, and its impact through expression of self. The Black Feminist Theory chapter will begin with historical background of the different waves of U.S. Feminist theory and its distinction from Black Feminism. Black Feminist Patricia Hill Collins' work will be the focus of understanding the core concepts of intersectionality, safe space, forms of empowerment, self-esteem and body image issues. I intend to use Black feminist theory as a lens to deepen interpretation of research findings, and examine gaps in social media usage research as a way to compare and create competing formulations underlying Black women's usage of social media specifically in posting selfies of their natural hair process.

Self Psychology

Self psychology was selected as Kohut's theories on the spectrum of narcissism as well as his concepts of the "selfobject" and "cohesive self" provide insight into potential uses of social media as an exploration of self. The self psychology theory chapter focuses on the three major selfobject needs as central components to the development of a cohesive self: mirroring, idealizing and twinship selfobjects. In particular, focus on the twinship selfobject will be explored to help interpret posting of natural hair selfies for Black women as it relates to the importance of feeling connection and identity with others to strengthen the self (Togashi, 2012).

Exploration of Kohut's separation in psychodynamic thinking from Freud's clinical beliefs of narcissism are discussed, drawing light on Kohut's understanding of benefits to aspects of narcissism in forming a cohesive self. Background on Kohut's development as a psychoanalyst and upbringing are included in the beginning to provide insight into Kohut's theories. Finally, a discussion of Kohut's more contemporary development of the cultural selfobject will illuminate the importance in culture and how it impacts selfobject development in individuals towards a cohesive self.

Author's Sociocultural Location, Potential Biases and Strengths

It is important to include my sociocultural location and background to recognize potential sources of bias that may influence the perspective on the theoretical work and phenomenon. My biases may create gaps in the scope of research, discussion, and my assessment of identified issues. I identify as a 33-year-old, cisgender, able-bodied, multicultural Black woman, born and raised in privileged areas of Berkeley and Oakland, CA by a white single-parent upper-class woman. I lived in a white upper-class community as a child. My economic privilege allowed me access to private schooling throughout my childhood that led to a private undergraduate education at a liberal arts school, which informs my perspective. I possess a Juris Doctorate in law and am currently pursuing a degree in a field with a professional commitment to social justice. My socioeconomic privilege, able-bodiedness, and cisgender identity allow me to navigate multiple spaces without known discrimination. My experience as a woman-identified multicultural Black-identified person strongly informed and inspired this thesis and informs my analysis.

My belonging to the population that I am analyzing gives me a window into their lived experience, but it also may cause me to generalize my experience to that of others or choose to

look at certain actions in a less-critical viewpoint. Because there is limited empirical data available that explores particular issues of intersectionality within the Black female identity using social media and different intent and purpose within the community as a Black woman posting natural hair selfies, I too am grouping multiple different experiences of identity, lack intricate discussion of the impact of racial hierarchy in the phenomenon, and run the risk of missing complex aspects and nuances of this phenomenon. Additionally, as a cisgendered woman who identifies as multiracial Black, were I to place myself in the spectrum of Black and the racial hierarchy, traditionally, I fall in the category as someone with 'good hair' and a lighter complexion. I am also someone who does not participate in the process of posting selfies of my natural hair process. These aspects of my identity inform my view on the use of selfies, gaps in understanding due to my difference and lack of experience in social media usage and potential desire to make meaning of selfies that may or may not be valid for a large percentage of Black women engaged in this process. It is important to acknowledge the nuances and complexities in discussion that I do and do not explore, and I do so here with full acknowledgment that my focus on the experience of a particular aspect of this phenomenon certainly obscures multiple lived experiences of groups within this population whose voices are not fully or adequately explored here.

One strength in this theoretical process is through use of different theoretical lenses, the theory provides additional conceptualization and historical framework to the qualitative research conducted on this particular phenomenon. Of the few studies conducted on this specific use of social media for a particular population, outside brief literature reviews, little theory is provided that assists in our understanding of the conscious and/or unconscious statements being conveyed at the intra-, inter- and structural level. As many psychodynamic theories tend not to explore

intersectionality of culture or race in the applicability of the theory, it is important to widen the conversation so that clinicians are aware of the gaps in theory or potential strengths in certain forms of psychoanalysis that may support or deepen the therapeutic alliance and clinical work.

Conclusion

Through preliminary research for this thesis, it became apparent that a potentially useful approach to analyzing this phenomenon could be found by framing the phenomenon through self psychology and Black feminist theory. Self psychology, like most psychodynamic theories, lacks a cultural competency lens. A chapter on Black Feminist theory therefore seems appropriate to provide additional information and possible explanations for the behavior, including exploration of how structural and historical racism impact the development of 'self' in individuals. Chapter II will present a summary of the phenomenon of selfies, an overview of the historical importance of hair for Black women and the online natural hair movement. Chapter III will examine the Black Feminist perspective, focusing on how the use of social media and postings of selfies may provide potential personal, social, and cultural benefits through participating in the online natural hair care movement for Black women. Chapter IV will examine how natural hair selfies may be examined through psychodynamic theory of Kohut's self psychology and include exploration of his theories on narcissism. Finally, Chapter V will discuss, analyze, and synthesize the previous two chapters, examine different case vignettes, and conclude with treatment recommendations.

CHAPTER II

Phenomenon

This chapter will explore the phenomenon of Black women posting selfies on SNS, specifically on Facebook and Instagram. The popular literature and academic research on social media related to this topic will be explored in order to identify the current gaps within the research. Particular attention will be given to research implicating Facebook usage and other forms of social media being directly linked to self-worth, self-esteem, and narcissism in American culture. Consideration will be given to the lack of exploration within research on potential differences in social media usage and findings regarding self-esteem, self-identity, self-representation, and narcissism based on cultural or racial differences. In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon, this chapter will begin by presenting an essential historical backdrop to historical and structural racism and its impact on Black women's bodies. This background information informs the selfie phenomenon, it's scope, and the frequency of use of social media by Black women to explore their natural hair process through selfies.

Historical Backdrop on Black Women's Hair

In American culture, many Black women struggle at different points in their lives to overcome feeling estranged from their own beauty and identity, grappling with Eurocentric western conceptions of beauty that overemphasize and glorify straight hair, light skin, and light eyes. In Black communities, hair and hair styling has its roots in the structural and systemic regulation of Black women's bodies (Cooper, 2014). Some Black women who choose to wear

natural hairstyles may struggle with a sense of marginalized identity due to a lack of recognition of natural hair as beautiful in American mainstream culture. Hair in Black culture historically is a symbol of beauty, strength, and power; the style adorned can suggest one's socioeconomic status, religious affiliation, culture, age, and/or marital status (Koppelman, 1996). The care taken with a Black girl's hair may signal that she is loved and cared for; that she belongs to someone; moreover, having unkempt and uncombed hair was a sign of parental neglect in the Black community (Cooper, 2014). For many Black women, hair is a strong part of their identity (Weitz, 2004). Thus, Weitz articulates, "changing our hair, then, changes our identity because our hair and our appearance are central to how we see ourselves" (Weitz, 2004, p. 64).

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

Hair and Colorism During Slavery

Since slavery, Black women's bodies have been systematically devalued and degraded in American culture. During slavery, hair texture—moreso than skin color—was the most powerful symbol of enslavement (Byrd & Tharps, 2001). Slaves with lighter skin tones and straighter hair were delegated highly coveted jobs and valued five times more than their kinkier-haired and darker-skinned female counterparts, who were forced to work in the fields (Byrd & Tharps, 2001). Hair was the " 'true test of blackness' for light skinned slaves or mulatto slaves" (p. 18).

The concept of a racial hierarchy within the African-American community started during

slavery and had very practical implications and potential privileges (Byrd & Tharps, 2001).

Working in the plantation house gave some slaves access to hand-me-down clothes, better food,

education, less backbreaking labor than those in the fields, and sometimes even a promise of

freedom upon their master's death (Byrd & Tharps, 2001, p. 18). Black women sought out ways

to lighten their skin and straighten their hair believing marketing campaigns that suggested that

"only through changing physical features will persons of African descent be afforded class

mobility within African-American communities and social acceptance by the dominant culture"

(Byrd & Tharps, 2001, p. 23). It is said that when Africans were put into the slave ships, their

hair was shaved off (Byrd & Tharps, 2001). This served to increase self-hatred and insecurity in

an effort to prevent rebellions and liberation (Lake, 2003, p. 82). It erased their culture, altered

their relationship with their hair, and made African's feel like "anonymous chattel" (Byrd &

Tharps, 2001, p. 11).

Emancipation, Hair and Assimilation

After Emancipation, there was safety in conforming to European American beliefs of

beauty and style. Natural hair was associated with being rural, ungroomed, and uneducated.

"Because many of the more than one hundred thousand free Blacks in nineteenth-century

America were the mulatto offspring of the first African arrivals and their European companions,

lighter skin and loosely curled hair would often signify free status" (Byrd & Tharps, 2001, p. 17).

"Black women who attempted to style their hair in long, prim, and proper styles to their White

counterparts were considered well-adjusted by White society" rather than being considered

uppity or wild (Byrd & Tharps, 2001, p. 22). Black women's hair became a badge of inferiority

outside of European mainstream standards beauty. Women were taught that having "nappy" hair

was a badge of shame (Banks, 2000).

Through slavery and even after Emancipation, Black women's humanity was stolen. Their struggle for humanization in the present day includes overcoming feeling alienated from affirming their own beauty and identity. The debate continues of whether "Black women feel shameful of their hair in a natural state or a sense of liberation by chemically altering their hair" (Johnson, 2013, p. 81). One scholar, Lake, argues that the "processing of natural hair is one manifestation of people's estrangement from their cultural foundations," which some interpret as a sign of internalized racism (Lake, 2003, p. 82). Kimberly Battle-Walters says it succinctly "[t]oday, although slavery is officially over, lighter-skinned African American women unfortunately still often hold a certain unspoken higher spot in the pecking order over dark African American women due to a social obsession with color and colorism" (Battle-Walters, 2004, p. 48). Cooper discusses current bans on locks, twists, and cornrows in the military as a need to "discipline" and "tame" Black women's hair. She states that those who have 'liberated' their hair think of ongoing Black cultural investment in long straight hair, wigs, weaves and perms as "evidence of a kind of pathological investment in European standards of beauty" (Cooper, 2014).

Many may argue that women who choose to relax and straighten their hair symbolize Black women who lack the ability to define themselves outside of the oppressive European American standards (Friere, 1970). Understanding what 'liberation' through hair presentation may be and whether one's styling of their hair is personal and/or political likely depends on each individual. Regardless, it is important to examine the historical and racial underpinnings that impact individual hair styling decisions. For example, during the 1960s Black Power Movement, some Black women wore the Afro as a form of assimilation to survive within the revolutionary culture (Byrd and Tharps, 2001). In contrast, other Black women who wore Afros during this

time might consider it a statement of self-love. During the 1960s, part of the revolutionary civil rights movement symbolism included the Afro. An individual's decision to straighten one's hair or choice to wear or not wear an Afro had significant political implications. Pablo Friere discusses how oppressed communities in their process of liberation, become "sub-oppressors" (*e.g.,* internalized racism) in the initial process of restoring their humanity (e.g., finding their identity, connecting to their natural hair); therefore, the Afro from Friere's perspective, might be an example of Black women liberating themselves (Friere, 1970). This is because the ideal that Black women have strived for in the past—to be considered a "woman"—was only achieved through straightening or relaxing one's hair. "Woman" and beauty were defined historically through Eurocentric standards so that now the mainstream conception of "woman" does not incorporate natural aspects of a Black woman's identity. "The oppressed, having internalized the image of the oppressor and adopted his guidelines, are fearful of freedom" (Friere, 1970, p. 47).

Friere's perspectives have current relevant meaning as ongoing systemic and institutional restrictions (*e.g.,* workplace grooming requirements) is a clear example of "pervasive cultural and legal policing of black women's bodies" (Cooper, 2014, para. 21). For example, in 1981, Renee Rodgers sued American Airlines for banning braided cornrow hairstyles. The court found in favor of American Airlines stating the policy applied to employees equally and thus did not violate the law; however, Rodgers felt the policy was a form of racial discrimination (Cooper, 2014). Today, Black women are required to style their hair as part of employee protocol in certain work environments. For example, in the military, all women are banned from wearing certain hairstyles (Cooper, 2014). Cooper, a Black scholar and professor, would argue that this workplace requirement is a form of racial discrimination, requiring many Black women in the

military to undergo medical risks from hair straightening to remain in the military (Cooper, 2014).

Internalized racism obtained through intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural racism during slavery has ongoing manifestations in the Black community today. These concerns continue to plague some Black women's sense of self, racial and cultural identity, and self-esteem. The take-away message is that Black women's bodies continue to not be just their own—they are spaces marking one's ongoing attempts to assimilate to Western standards, a site for collective resistance; a space that is interpreted by mainstream and marginalized communities alike to decrypt where one fits in and how one views her identity. Regardless of her intent to be her own person, a Black woman's body may mark very delineated progression of American history and the ongoing oppression of Black women in the United States.

Social Media and Selfies

Regardless of the way Black women choose to wear their hair, one's hair and hair styling is "laden with messages and has the 'power to dictate how others treat you, and in turn, how you feel about yourself'" (Thompson, 2009, p. 78). Social networking sites connect individuals across the globe through the internet creating virtual communities that provide quick access to global knowledge bases filled with information, recommendations, tutorials, video diaries, blogs, and photographs. In 2010, Facebook was considered the most commonly used online social networking site among adults and continues to grow (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zichuhr, 2010). Facebook has 1.35 billion active users with 152 million daily active users in the United States and Canada (Facebook, 2015). Instagram, acquired by Facebook, is second only to Facebook with a total of 30 billion photos shared since its launch in October 2010 (Instagram Press, 2015). On average, Instagram has over 70 million photographs circulating on a daily basis, has over 300

million monthly users (Instagram Press, 2015). One of the main uses of social networking sites, particularly Instagram, is the posting of the selfie. Since June 2014, More than 130 million user images and videos have been hashtagged with the word 'selfie' on Instagram (i.e., #I, #me, #myself, #self, #selfie, #selfies, and #selfportrait) and account for over 439 million user images and videos (Wendt, 2014). Currently on Instagram and Facebook, there is a strong natural hair care 'movement' for Black women, encouraging individuals to share selfies of their natural hair process using different hashtags.

Natural Hair Movement on Social Networking Sites

For Black women, natural hair selfies has become a source of support, a means of building self-esteem, and a way to track their natural hair journey. Through posting or commenting on selfie postings, Black women may post selfies as a means to pushback against mainstream projections of 'beauty' that may perpetuate internalized racism through continuous promotion of relaxed hair and straight hairstyles. Black women post selfies on social media sites embracing their natural hair and receiving affirmation and support of their natural hair practices from friends, family, and/or strangers. Although most academic research and conversation in the press around selfies and social media focuses on selfies as narcissistic, women (and in this thesis Black women specifically) may be using social media as a new form of empowerment and positive self-presentation through self-portraiture. In sum, social media sites provide a unique venue for individuals to express alternate identities and selves.

Use of Selfies

In 2010 when the front-facing camera was created, it astronomically projected average mobile phone user's abilities to share their lives through visual self-representation—or some might argue self-portraiture—in the form of selfies. The iPhone has made photography easily

accessible to mainstream America and in combination with social media, provided a new medium for marginalized communities to use the photographic lens to communicate their process of creating, finding, and/or supporting their cultural identity. Particularly for Black women who may not have individuals in their community who also wear their hair naturally, access to an online community provides support and acceptance they may not have received otherwise. Individuals may feel able to express aspects of their identity that remain hidden or unexplored in their lives. One qualitative study conducted in 2014 interviewed 17 African American women and found SNS provide support for African American women towards accepting and appreciating their natural hair through exchange of information concerning natural hair care and styling through social media sites (Ellington, 2014). Traynor (2013) found online communal spaces where Black women can engage in giving and receiving support of their Black identities may reverse the impact of racism and/or internalized racism and provide space towards new ways to accept and love their identity.

Although natural hair movements have existed prior to the creation of social networking sites, social media has created a new platform for the natural hair community. These sites on Facebook, Instagram, and Tumblr (and the individuals who post selfies) strongly emphasize how natural hair is beautiful. Although the specific amount of Black women who use Facebook or Instagram to post natural hair selfies is unknown, when conducting a basic search on Instagram using hashtags such as #naturalhair, #naturalhairjourney, or #naturalhaircommunity, some of these forums have over four million postings, many with supportive comments or "likes" from multiple users. In addition to forums created through common hashtags, individuals also create online Instagram identities and obtain followers who like or comment on posted selfies. For example, one user, naturalhairproject, has over 4,000 followers, while naturalhairdaily has over

146,000 followers. Platforms such as Facebook or Instagram empower individuals to resist mainstream conceptions of beauty. Two participants in a qualitative study on natural hair in social networking sites commented:

> There would be a lot of times when I would have a lot of doubt, especially when I was transitioning, and like your family members would be telling you like "You're ugly, don't do that". And like, you were never ugly, your hair was never ugly, umm, it was just this issue of like you're just not used to seeing yourself this way. It's basically beaten into you that like your curly kinky hair is bad and that makes you ugly to have curly kinky hair. Umm, like, I felt like it was really helpful to have an outlet- so that was back when I was participating more online. It's to have an outlet to talk to other people who are going through the same thing or women who are older who were going through that in the 70s and just never turned back. So like, that was cool, and I guess I've always felt it's affirming to see people like you. (Moore, 2014, p. 27)

> I think we need to keep hearing our journey, so we can normalize our hair. You know? And not, and I'm not saying that we are the ones that made it not normal, because I think that's not true. I think that we participated in it, but I don't think that we were the impetus for it not being normal. But I think I'm kind of tired with the 'Omg, look at your locs!', you know, I want it to be like, you know, in your face all of the time. And I feel like that's what's happening, to be honest with you.... And the reason that I'm excited about it is...it's because of what I know has to do with this love of self. So much of our own internalized racism and the stuff that we sort of walk around with partly is, of course, laid up with how

we, the relationship we have with our own natural hair. And I'm not saying that

folks that have straight hair can't feel that way. ...I'm just saying that it's

important to have that relationship at least once in your life. (Moore, 2014, p. 21)

Research and Research Gaps

As Instagram is such a new social networking platform, there are few academic research

studies that specifically address natural hair selfies in social media, and few to none that examine

Instagram in particular. Facebook has a larger contingency of research studies; however, these

articles focus primarily on self-esteem, addiction, narcissism, or personality traits. Furthermore,

there is little information regarding the potential future impact social networking sites and selfie

culture may have on individuals and communities. Although there is little research specific to

this phenomenon, there are other studies examining the impact and/or development of racial

identity, self-esteem, self-worth, and narcissism in relation to social media usage.

Research on Cultural or Racial Identity and Social Media

A study conducted in 2014 with 314 African American and Hispanic middle and high

school students found many teenagers indicating their sense of identity and self-worth was

strongly linked with their cell phones (Lee, 2014). Nielsen consumer studies found in 2013 that

71% of African Americans owned smartphones, over the average rate for the general population

in 2013 ("Resilient, Receptive", 2013). Nielsen also recently found that African Americans use

social media as a place to voice opinion and join conversations on multiple issues ("Listen up",

2013). Lee found that displaying photographs and personal interests on Facebook supports racial

identity development among African American college students (Lee, 2012).

Research on Black Identity and Self-Esteem

Not specific to social media, other academic research regarding African-American women examines the relationship between hair, self-esteem, and beauty. Goodstein and Ponterotto (1997) explored in their research how racial and ethnic identity correlates with self-esteem among White and Black people, and found that racial and ethnic identity affected self-esteem for Black participants. Robinson (2011) interviewed over thirty Black women, ranging in age from 19-81 with variations in hair texture, hair state (natural vs. unnatural), and with different racial presentation (different shade and racial presentations), to examine the connection between race, Black female beauty, and hair texture. In her study she explored the concept of hair hierarchy (kinky and coily being less desirable than wavy or straight) and how race and maintenance are factors in desired hair type (Robinson, 2011). More recently, in 2000 Banks had five focus groups with Black women discussing hair and then interviewed 43 participants. Banks found consistent themes regarding hair including: economic empowerment, gender roles and expectations, messages that could be conveyed by hairstyles, autonomy, and cultural authenticity (Banks, 2000).

Social Media Usage Correlation with Self-Esteem, Narcissism, and Self-Worth

Research specific to social media usage focused predominantly on examining issues of self-esteem and narcissism. Self-esteem was found to be negatively related to Facebook activity and to time spent on Facebook; thus, the more time spent on Facebook, the lower one's self esteem (Kalpidou, Costin & Morris, 2011). Stefanone, Lackaff, and Rosen (2011) investigated the contribution of self-worth to specific online activities, such as photo sharing. The results indicated that contingencies or sources of self-worth, such as appearance, approval of generalized others, and outdoing others explained online photo sharing (Stefanone, Lackaff, &

Rosen, 2011). Another study found that portraying of the self to others online increased self-objectification in young women, especially after they had been primed with objectifying media content from an advertisement (de Vries & Peter, 2013). In 2014, researchers identified basic motive dimensions including self-presentation, escapism, and meeting new people to understand continual Facebook usage (Masur, Reinecke, Ziegele, & Quiring, 2014).

A fair amount of research on social media usage explores correlations with narcissism. It is important to note that narcissism is defined somewhat differently in each study. For the purposes of this thesis, narcissism is defined based on what is considered 'sub-clinical' or 'normal' narcissism (Campbell & Rudich, 2002). This type of narcissism differs from the DSM-V narcissistic personality disorder diagnosis: it displays some characteristics of the disorder but may not meet all requirements for diagnosis (Campbell & Rudich, 2002). One study showed that narcissists more often updated their profiles on Facebook, showed more appealing profile photos, and generally were more focused on self-promotional goals (Blachino, Przepiórka, & Rudnicka, 2013). Carpenter (2012) attempted to establish the relationship between the pattern of using Facebook and two elements of narcissism: the "Grandiose Exhibitionism" related to the need of being in the center of others' attention, and the "Entitlement/Exploitativeness" connected with the sense of deservingness and ignoring others' needs and feelings. According to Nadkarni and Hofmann's (2012) dual-factor model, Facebook use is motivated by two needs: belonging and self-presentation. Mehdizadeh (2010) found narcissism was related not only to the frequency and intensity of using Facebook but also to self-promotion in some Facebook applications (*e.g.,* profile photos, status updates).

Other studies investigated whether specific online activities, such as photo sharing, contributed to sense of self-worth (Stefanone, Lackaff, & Rosen, 2011; Nadkarni & Hofmann,

2011). One study found indications that sources of self-worth, such as appearance, approval of generalized others, and outdoing others explained online photo sharing (Stefanone, Lackaff, & Rosen, 2011). Finally, one exploratory study found eight different types of photo categories on Instagram, 46.6% of which were selfie photos, with 24.2% of those selfies being categorized as self-portraits (Hu, Manikonda, & Kambhampati, 2014).

In sum, the review of the literature on social media use suggests that high levels of extraversion, low self-esteem, narcissism, and self-worth are associated with high social media use. Current research examining this issue specifically with Facebook use seems to have conflicting findings (Bergman, Fearrington, Davenport, & Bergman, 2011; Carpenter, 2012; Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012; Davenport et. al, 2014; Twenge et. al, 2014). Furthermore, research that does examine the impact of posting of selfies and relationship to different personality features or creation of personality disorders or traits tends to demonize most forms of social media usage, particularly for adolescent or college age individuals. Regardless, most research tends to leave unexamined cultural differences in social media usage, cultural aspects of self-worth, and differences between racial identities and meaning behind posting of selfies. Where racial differences are noted, categories such as Black do not specify cultural background, which if clarified, might show differences in social media usage between cultures. This will be discussed further in the discussion chapter.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there seem to be positive indications for Black women using social media as a forum for obtaining support and affirmation in their natural hair process; however, little research focuses on culturally-specific usages of social media and much research shows conflicting findings and possible negative effects of Facebook use in particular, with little

information in how race is implicated in these findings. Across the board, there appears to be little research that focuses on empowerment or exploration and discovery of identity and self through use of social networking sites. Research examining implications of social media usage related to natural hair for Black women remains unanswered outside a few qualitative studies. The next chapter will explore Black Feminist Theory in an attempt to examine whether posting of natural hair selfies may be a form of self-definition or self-love for Black women.

<div align="center">

CHAPTER III

Black Feminist Theory

"Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface" (Lorde, 1984, p. 60).

</div>

This section will explore Black Feminist Theory primarily from the perspective of Patricia Hill Collins's work as well as the works of other highly regarded Black feminist theorists including bell hooks, Audre Lorde, Kimberle Crenshaw, Karla Holloway, and Donna Caraway to elucidate some of the important concepts in Black Feminist theory that will be used to explore natural hair selfies. This theory in particular may help to clarify and problematize the issue of whether and when natural hair selfies may be considered a contemporary form of Black Feminism, particularly as a form of self-love and self-definition for Black women. First, this chapter will provide some historical background on U.S. Feminist movements and creation of the Black Feminist movement, then focus on Collins's definition of Black Feminism, and finally discuss two main tenets of Collins's theory: self-definition and self-love.

U.S. Feminist Movements

Feminism is a broad umbrella term that encompasses a multitude of theories and different interpretations of its meaning (McMillen, 2008; Bennett, 2006). Feminism has different meanings depending on the theorist or activist. For Barbara Smith, feminism is " the political theory and practice to free all women….Anything less than this vision of total freedom is not feminism, but merely female self-aggrandizement" (Bennett, 2006, p. 13). For Jean Scott feminism is "a site where differences conflict and coalesce, where common interests are articulated and contested, where identities achieve temporary stability…" For Charlotte Bunch,

feminism is "an entire world view or gestalt, not just a laundry list of 'women's issues'" (Bennett, 2006, p. 13). Regardless of the various definitions by different activists who self-identify as feminists, the underlying perspective seeks to promote equality (legal, economic, educational, racial, sexual, social status) for women based on the premise that historically women have been oppressed and subordinated in different legal, institutional, and familial systems due to their gender (McMillen, 2008; Bennett, 2006). The point of broadly categorizing the purpose of feminism is not to universalize or suppress difference, but through generalizing and seeking patterns among differences, find strategic opportunities to articulate difference toward creating greater understanding, stronger coalitions, and unification (Bennett, 2006).

Three Waves of U.S. Feminist Movements

"Even though feminism has been unfairly stereotyped as a single sort of Western, individualistic feminism, women's rights advocates worldwide have continued to claim the term as their own and put it to their own uses" (Bennett, 2006, p. 12); however, for the purposes of this thesis, the researcher will not provide a historical overview of the multiple global Feminist movements, but will focus on the three "waves" of U.S. Feminism. First wave feminism is described as the period during the late nineteenth to early twentieth century when feminist activists—suffragists—were fighting primarily for the right to vote (Dicker, 2008). In 1920, when the Nineteenth Amendment was passed women were granted the right to vote and later slowly provided broader access to additional rights including the right to property ownership, right to divorce, and custody rights (Walters, 2005). During this time, many Black women including Sojourner Truth, Ida B. Wells, Mary Church Terrell, Frances E.W. Harper, and Maria Stewart worked side by side with white suffragists as both abolitionists and advocate for women's suffrage (Krolkke & Srensen, 2005). However, due to racial discrimination by some

white suffragists, many Black women felt alienated in the movement and thus began developing separate women's clubs such as the National Association of Colored Women and the National Baptist Woman's Convention (Krolkke & Srensen, 2005). Donna Caraway states

> Black women's voices were continually marginalized within both movements, and so through their struggle, a new theory and new organizations were created to support Black women's process of standing up in the face of multiple oppressions and speaking out from a space that accepted all aspects of the Black women's identity as interconnected. (Collins, 1998, p. 66)

During the 1960s to 1980s, a second wave of feminism emerged and established the basis for a growing field of research on gender equality (Collins, 1998). Second wave feminism pushed a sophisticated rhetoric of equity, claiming women and men should be treated as equals and that women should not just receive access to the same resources and positions as men, but also be acknowledged for their contributions and competencies (Krolkke & Srensen, 2005). Second wave feminism focused primarily on institutional discrimination, reproductive rights, sexual harassment, and issues of domestic violence (Collins, 1998).

As the second wave feminist movement focused on broadly expanding legal protections for women, the Black Liberation Movement was simultaneously in full force fighting for civil rights. Organizations like SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee), the Black Panthers, and other such activist organizations focused primarily on Black male oppression, unintentionally making little space for Black women to express their unique experience of gender and racial oppression. As their intersectional identities were unspoken, their issues and needs were systematically ignored in both the U.S. feminist and civil rights movements, causing many Black women to feel alienated. Due to this struggle, Black women began to develop a

new movement, creating separate clubs and organizations that spoke to the complexities of their identity (Schwall, 2004). For example, Michele Wallace, a member of the Combahee River Collective expressed how "[w]e exist as women who are Black who are feminists, each stranded for the moment, working independently because there is not yet an environment in this society remotely congenial to our struggle- because, being on the bottom, we would have to do what no one else has done: we would have to fight the world" (Wallace, 1992, p. 6-7). Kimberle Crenshaw, a critical race theorist and lawyer, first proposed a feminist sociological theory which suggested and examined how various biological, social and cultural categories (including but not limited to race, gender, socioeconomic status, ability, sexual orientation, and other axes of identity) interact on multiple and often simultaneous levels. She termed this concept *intersectionality*, which states that forms of oppression within society (such as racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia) do not act independently of one another. Instead, these forms of oppression interrelate, creating a system of oppression that reflects the "intersection" of multiple forms of discrimination (Crenshaw, 1989; Crenshaw, 1993). Crenshaw believed that "single-axis framework erases Black women in the conceptualization, identification, and remediation of race and sex discrimination by limiting inquiry to the experiences of otherwise-privileged members of the group," and suggested further that focusing on otherwise-privileged group members distorts the analysis of racism and sexism as the "operative conceptions of race and sex become grounded in experiences that actually represent only a subset of a much more complex phenomenon" (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 140).

In the mid-1990s, third wave feminism emerged in response to the failings of the first and second wave, which continues today (Krolkke, 2005). "Third wave feminism manifests itself in "grrl" rhetoric, which seeks to overcome the theoretical question of equity or difference and

political question of evolution or revolution, while it challenges the notion of 'universal womanhood' and embraces ambiguity, and multiplicity…" (Krolkke, 2005, p. 2). The current wave of feminism seeks to develop feminist theory and politics that honor contradictory experiences and "deconstruct[s] categorical thinking" (Krolkke, 2005, p. 16).

Throughout U.S. feminist movements, Black female activists speak to feeling isolated and alienated. Lorde expresses that within the U.S. Feminist movement, women of color became "other, the outsider whose experience and tradition is too 'alien' to comprehend" (Lorde, 1984, p. 117). Black women called for the creation of a movement that would acknowledge and affirm positions of intersectionality (Collins, 1998). Kimberle Crenshaw explains "difference in identity politics is problematic, fundamentally because the violence that many women experience is often shaped by other dimension of their identities, such as race and class" (Crenshaw, 1993, p. 1242). Crenshaw states "ignoring difference *within* groups contributes to tension *among* groups (Crenshaw, 1993, p. 1242). bell hooks, a highly acclaimed black feminist advocate, expresses some of her personal struggles with "feminism,"

> [t]hroughout the more than twenty years that I have spent writing feminist theory,
> I have consistently worked to make a clear distinction between revolutionary
> feminist politics and the more widely accepted version of feminism that has as its
> primary agenda achieving for white women of privileged classes social and
> economic equality with men of their class. (hooks, 1989, p. 98)

Audre Lorde examined the absence of racial oppression in the U.S. Feminist movement reflected "[b]y and large within the women's movement today, white women focus upon their oppression as women and ignore differences of race, sexual preference, class, and age. There is a pretense to a homogeneity of experience covered by the word sisterhood that does not in fact exist" (Lorde,

1984, p. 116). Thus, Black Feminist theory and the Black Feminist movement incorporate the concept of intersectionality, or the ways in which intersecting systems and patterns of oppression impact individuals differently based on their racial, ethnic, sexual, economic, religious, able-bodied, and gender identities (Davis, 2008). In explaining the need to create new terminology for Black feminism, Collins explains that,

> [i]n the United States, the term Black feminism…disrupts the racism inherent in presenting feminism as a for-Whites-only ideology and political movement. Inserting the adjective Black challenges the term for both White and Black American women. Since many White women think that Black women lack feminist consciousness, the term Black feminist both highlights the contradictions underlying the assumed Whiteness of feminism and reminds White women that they are neither the only nor the normative 'feminists.' (Collins, 1998, p. 67)

Defining Black Feminism: An Ongoing Conversation

Many theorists debate how to define what Black feminist theory is, yet Black feminism at its core, is the creation of a collective voice for Black women (Collins, 1998). Alice Walker as well as many other activists such as Toni Cade Bambara, Ntozake Shange, Angela Davis, Toni Morrison, Audre Lorde, bell hooks, June Jordan, Patricia Hill Collins and other Black female activists, writers, and lawyers helped establish a collective voice and public safe space for Black women's voices to be heard. In that process of creating collective voice, they force exploration of what and for whom that space is meant; Black women explore the complexity in carving out a singular voice when Black women have multiple "axes" of difference such as sexuality, socioeconomic status, nationality, religion, region, and so forth. Part of the benefit and difficulty

within the Black feminist movement is to maintain the complexity and ambiguity of the individual experience while simultaneously identify and maintain a unified voice.

From Patricia Hill Collins's perspective, the beginning of identifying what Black feminism identification was (i.e., distinguishing Black feminism from other forms of feminisms) started when Alice Walker coined the term "womanish" or "womanism" (Collins, 1998). Walker's *womanism* means a "woman who loves another woman, sexually and/ or non sexually. She appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility...[she] is committed to the survival and wholeness of an entire people, male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically for health... loves the spirit.... loves struggle. Loves herself. Regardless"(Walker, 1983, p. xii). Walker created this term in the 1980s to provide a new perspective on feminism that honored the experience of Black women and women of color. However, even in the start of defining what Black feminism meant, Walker recognized the tensions within the identity. Patricia Hill Collins points out that the term womanish

> [i]nvokes three important yet contradictory philosophies that frame black social and political thought, namely, black nationalism via her claims of black women's moral and epistemological superiority via suffering under racial and gender oppression, pluralism via the cultural integrity provided by the metaphor of the garden, and integration/assimilation via her claims that black women are 'traditionally universalist'. (Andersen & Collins, 2001, p. 11)

Thus, The Black women activist community struggled for self-definition. Differing perspectives emerged among Black feminists regarding whether Black women's standpoints should be classified as "womanism" or "Black feminism." As the theory continues to be defined, Collins's

analysis of Walker's womanism creates space to access and analyze core philosophical differences that exist among Black feminists.

Collins defines *Black feminism* as "both an ideology and a global political movement that confronts sexism, a social relationship in which men as a collectivity have authority over women as a collectivity" (Collins, 1998, p. 66). She identifies four major tenets in her construction and interpretation of Black feminist thought: (1) Black women empower themselves through creation of self-definitions and self valuations which enable them to establish positive, multiple images and repel negative, controlling representations of Black womanhood; (2) Black women confront and dismantle the "overarching" and "interlocking" structure of domination in terms of race, class, and gender oppression; (3) Black women intertwine intellectual thought and political activism; and (4) Black women recognize a distinct cultural heritage that gives them energy and skills to resist and transform daily discrimination (Collins, 1998). June Jordan emphasizes these pillar concepts through her experience:

> I am a feminist, and what that means to me is much the same as the meaning of the fact that I am Black: it means that my very life depends upon self-love and self-respect. It means that I must everlastingly seek to cleanse myself of the hatred and the contempt that surrounds and permeates my identity, as a woman, and as a Black human being, in this particular world of ours. It means that the achievement of self-love and self-respect will require inordinate, hourly vigilance, and that I am entering my soul into a struggle that will most certainly transform the experience of all the peoples of the earth, as no other movement into self-love, self-respect, and self-determination is the movement now galvanized everywhere. (Muller & Jordan, 1995, p. 142)

Here, we will focus on two particular themes in Patricia Hill Collins' Black Feminist Theory perspective: self-definition and self-love.

Black feminism as self-definition

Collins argues that self-definition "speaks to the power dynamics involved in rejecting externally defined, controlling images of Black womanhood" (Collins, 1998, p. 114-115). Self-definition is central to Black women's ability to define and thus value themselves, which in turn establishes positive images and representations of Black women. Toni Cade Bambara succinctly states, "[r]evolution begins with the self, in the self" (Jackobsen, 1998, p. 109). Collin echoes and deepens the meaning of Bambara's statement, explaining "no matter how oppressed an individual woman may be, the power to save the self lies within the self" (Collins, 1998, p. 119). Creating a self-defined perspective empowers individuasls. Much of the power obtained through self-definition provides a vehicle to express one's consciousness, which stimulates resistance (Collins, 1998). In addition, self-definition is key to any individual being empowered to prevent dominant discourse from replicating or reinforcing existing oppressive power hierarchies (Collins, 1998). hooks asserts "[a]s objects, one's reality is defined by others, one's identity created by others, one's history named only in ways that define one's relationship to those who are subject" (hooks, 1989, p. 42). hooks explains "[a]s subjects, people have the right to define their own reality, establish their own identities, name their history" and obtain power through self-definition (hooks, 1989, p. 42). Collins supports hooks's statements, adding how historically black women's lives have been a "series of negotiations" wherein a constant struggle exists to "reconcile the contradictions separating our own internally defined images of self as African-American women with our objectification as the Other" (Collins, 1998, p. 99). Thus, hooks and

Collins call for Black women to fight against one's objectification and reclaim their subjectivity through defining one's self. Collins states,

> By insisting on self-definition, Black women question not only what has been said about African-American women but the credibility and the intentions of those possessing the power to define. When Black women define ourselves, we clearly reject the assumption that those in positions granting them authority to interpret our reality are entitled to do so. Regardless of the actual content of Black women's self-definitions, the act of insisting on Black female self-definition validates Black women's power as human subjects. (Collins, 1998, p. 114)

Collins urges Black women to learn to speak outside of the "frames and systems authorities provide" and "create their own frame" and with it their own collective voice (Collins, 1998, p. 100). She reiterates this concept and the importance of self-definition through her contextualization that "[f]or U.S. Black women, constructed knowledge of self emerges from the struggle to replace controlling images with self-defined knowledge deemed personally important, usually knowledge essential to Black women's survival" (Collins, 1998, p. 100). For Collins, central to the process of self-definition is community, which is an additional aspect to the conceptual differences between U.S. feminism and Black feminism.

Collins argues, the exploration of "self" in Black culture does not follow standardized western forms of "self" exploration. Collins justifies part of the difficulty for Black women to define self is based on cultural differences that are not examined or identified in mainstream American culture. In general mainstream American culture, "self" is defined as increasing one's autonomy and separating oneself from others; however, "self" in Black culture is found in the context of community and family (Collins, 1998). It is a means to create an identity as a mode to

obtain a certain consciousness and through that consciousness understand "how our personal lives have been fundamentally shaped by intersecting oppressions of race, gender, sexuality, and class" (Collins, 1998, p. 114). Thus, Collins posits, through the creation of connectedness found through community, Black women obtain "deeper, more meaningful self-definitions" (Collins, 1998, p. 111).

Black feminism as Self-Love

Collins's Black feminist theory emphasizes the importance for Black women to love themselves as a form of feminism. June Jordan suggests that this emphasis on respect is tied to a distinctive Black feminist politic. For Jordan, she states "I cannot be expected to respect what somebody else calls self-love if that concept of self-love requires my suicide to any degree" (Jordan, 1981, p. 144). She indicates how multiple systems of oppression actively seek to force Black women to internalize negative perceptions of Blackness. Moreover, it is critical for Black women to expose the ways in which these systems assault their self-esteem, self-worth, and self-love (Collins, 1998). Audre Lorde, in exploring aspects of self-love or barriers to self-love suggested "the true focus of revolutionary change is never merely the oppressive situations which we seek to escape, but that piece of the oppressor which is planted deep within each of us" (Lorde, 1984, p. 123). Thus, from a Black feminist perspective, to love oneself is radical, political, and requires recognition of internalized racism Black women may perpetuate through expression of self. Through the process of self-love, the act exposes the "coercive process informed by racist standards perpetuated in the United States" and replaces it with "a system of valuation that would embrace a diversity of black looks" (Collins, 1998, p. 119).

One example of the explicit practice of self-love occurred during the 1970s Black Power Movement. During that movement, the call of "Black is Beautiful" was an empowering

statement of self-definition and self-love. Large numbers of Black women stopped straightening their hair as "there was no longer any negative stigma attached to wearing one's hair with its natural texture" and the Afro became a symbol of revolution, empowerment, and self-love (Collins, 1998, p. 122).

Collins remarks about attempted forms of assimilation such as chemical straightening: "[f]ew black activists were vigilant enough to see that concrete rewards for assimilation would undermine subversive oppositional ways of seeing blackness" (Collins, 1998, p. 123). Collins argues this return to assimilation (via hair straightening) tendencies was due in part to access upward social mobility.

> Seeking to improve class mobility, to make it in the white world, black folks began to backtrack and assume once again the attitudes and values of internalized racism. Some folks justified their decisions to compromise and assimilate white aesthetic standards by seeing it as simply 'wearing the mask' to get over. This was best typified by those black females who wore straight 'white looking' wigs to work covering natural hairdos. (Collins, 1998, p. 124)

Currently, choices to straighten or wear one's hair naturally are argued as both symbols of Black feminist politics as well as solely an individual preference in style or financial decision (*i.e.,* natural hair is cheaper than processed hair). Some Black women do not want their hair styling choices to be considered a political statement; however, Lorde, Collins, and hooks might disagree that there is choice, arguing that Black women's bodies continue to be political space. Therefore, from their perspective, it is Black women's right and responsibility to reclaim statements made on their bodies without their permission and define themselves for themselves as an act of self-love (Collins, 1998).

Conclusion

The central concepts of self-definition and self-love from Collins's Black Feminist perspectives are useful in contextualizing and interpreting natural hair selfies as a potential act of empowerment, self-exploration and means to increase self-esteem rather than a form of psychopathology or increase in narcissistic tendencies. The next chapter on Self psychology will explore Kohut's conceptualization of narcissism, cohesive self and selfobjects to help us interpret the underlying internal process that may occur through the process of posting natural hair selfies.

CHAPTER IV

Self Psychology

Heinz Kohut, the founder of self psychology provided fundamental contributions to psychodynamic theory that originated from his exploration of narcissism. During this time, Freud felt narcissism, one dimension of psychopathology, stemmed from an imbalance in the conflict between internal forces. Kohut, however, felt internal conflicting generated from isolation and personal alienation (Mitchell & Black, 1995). Kohut's theories on narcissism and treatment of narcissistic personality disorder ultimately created the "psychology of the self" (Mitchell & Black, 1995). The purpose of this chapter is to provide a general overview on specific aspects of Self psychology applicable to the phenomenon studied in the thesis—namely the cohesive self, selfobjects and the tripolar self, and Kohut's perspectives on narcissism. Lastly, as there are no empirical studies on self psychology and selfies (or the specific phenomenon of natural hair selfies), the chapter will explore a few empirical studies examining Self psychology and issues related to the phenomenon (*i.e.,* the impact of Kohut's theory of selfobjects in relation to racial violence, race, creativity and culture).

The Creation of Self Psychology

Kohut's self psychology departed from Freud's viewpoints on instinctual drive, ego development, and narcissism. "Kohut emphasized the chronic traumatizing milieu of the patient's early human environment, not the primitive urges arising from within" (Mitchell & Black, 1995, p. 163). Kohut's theories developed out of an effort to treat patients who were not responding to ego psychology therapies (McLean, 2007) and created treatment methods for

narcissistic patients which suspended classic psychoanalytic training, focusing instead on

understanding the patient's experience from her perspective (Mitchell & Black, 1995). Kohut

searched for new ways to understand and treat patients who struggled with self-acceptance and

self-hatred—individuals that Freud frequently diagnosed with personality disorders and believed

to be unanalyzable and non-treatable (Freud, 1914). Kohut viewed the sexual and aggressive

impulses that Freud defined as basic to human motivation as secondary and consequential to

disruptions in the formation of the self (Mitchell & Black, 1995).

Self

Through Kohut's exploration of narcissism, his analysis led to what he ended up calling

the psychology of the self. Freud "used the concept of the self only casually and

unsystematically," whereas for Kohut, the concept of the "self" was the core of one's personality

and motivations (Mitchell & Black, 1995, p. 164). Kohut's "self" was "the center of the

individual's psychological universe" (Kohut, 1977, p. 311). Kohut's concept of the "self" was

universal; he viewed it as applicable to all patients. To Kohut, the "self" meant the fundamental

essence of all human-beings and included all self-representations and experiences (Wolf, 1988;

Fosshage, 2009). According to Kohut, children in their early phases of development whose

fundamental needs were met by caregivers led to the subsequent growth of healthy internal

structures. The creation of healthy structures created what Kohut coined the "cohesive self" (St.

Clair, 2004; Fosshage, 2009). As Freud's classic psychoanalytic theories focused on the

development of ego and psychosexual stages as part of development of emotional maturity,

Kohut believed that self rather than the ego was at the core of healthy development (St. Clair,

2004; Fosshage, 2009). To Kohut, self psychology attempted to prove "that all forms of

psychopathology are based either on defects in the structure of the self, on distortions of the self, or on weakness of the self" (Kohut, 1984, p. 53).

Selfobjects and the Triparite Self

Kohut theorized that in order to develop a healthy cohesive self, an individual needed the "developmental milieu of three specific kinds of selfobject experiences" (Mitchell & Black, 1995, p. 159). Kohut's developmental milieu required optimal interaction between a child's innate potential and empathic responses by selfobjects in the environment (Kohut, 1971). Kohut hypothesized that infants are born with a fundamental need for attachment and merger with a loving object. To Kohut, the formation of selfobjects occurred developmentally through the child's experiences with their primary caregiver. The object the infant experiences internally Kohut termed the "selfobject," which he defined as a fused state between infant and caregiver (Kohut, 1971). Self-objects are objects experienced as part of the self, "not as a separate person" (Wolf, 1988, p. 28). Kohut theorized individuals during childhood need three selfobject experiences. The first experience requires selfobjects "who respond to and confirm the child's innate sense of vigor, greatness and perfection" (Kohut & Wolf, 1978, p. 414). The second requires the child be involved with caregivers "to whom the child can look up and with whom he can merge as an image of calmness, infallibility, and omnipotence" (Kohut & Wolf, 1978, p. 414). Lastly, the child needs experiences with caregivers who "evoke a sense of essential likeness between the child and themselves" (Mitchell & Black, 1995, p. 159).

Kohut first conceived of the selfobject as an object (other or representation of other) that serves a narcissistic function. Kohut emphasized the difference between the self-being sustained by the functions of others versus the fusion of representations or images of self and other (Wolf, 1988). These selfobject needs contain kernels of healthy narcissism and need to be given the

space and environment during childhood to transform through exposure to reality for healthy development, increased differentiation of self and object, and gradual increase in comfort being separated from one's caregivers (Wolf, 1988).

These selfobject experiences or needs translated into Kohut's three selfobject types: (1) the mirroring selfobject confirming the child's self of greatness and perfection; (2) the idealized selfobject where the child takes in strength and calmness through idealization of others; and (3) the twinship or alter-ego selfobject which provides the child with a sense of being human and having a likeness to others. Kohut stated,

> Selfobject relationships form the essence of psychological life from birth to death, and that a move from dependence to independent in the psychological sphere is no more possible, let alone desireable, than a corresponding move from a life dependent on oxygen to a life independent of it in the psychological sphere.
> (Kohut, 1984, p. 47)

For example, when a child experiences a selfobject relationship as soothing, she acquires the capacity to soothe the self. These selfobject needs, Kohut argued, can be understood as "poles" within the self. Out of three types of selfobject needs, there was a tripartite self that was "driven by ambition, pulled by ideals, and needing to recognize itself in similar others"—to Kohut this created cohesion (Kohut, 1977).

> Healthy development occurs as the child transitions from birth into a tensionless existence, the empathically attuned parents provide and the child is unaware of an inner and outer world. As he grows, he becomes aware that the outer world is not perfect and cannot always provided for his needs. The child then attempts to maintain his original blissful state, believing himself to be perfect and omnipotent

(ie., the grandiose self), which is mirrored back to him by his parents. As a result

of the optimal frustrations, the child is still unaware aware of the other outer

world and sees others in his world as part from himself (i.e., his selfobjects as if

they were an arm or leg). Eventually, the child begins to notice that the selfobjects

regulate the level of tension, thus the child believes that his caregiver's ability to

regulate are actually done by the child….With these abilities also comes the

feelings of calm, security, safety and power protecting the child. (Liberman, 2013,

p. 255)

Grandiose Selfobject

The first pole (or selfobject) describes the desire and need to feel special and full of well-being (Baker & Baker, 1985). This pole theoretically develops from mirroring selfobjects that reflect, empathically respond, and approve of the child's unique capacities and characteristics. The grandiose self is developed through empathic attunement in which others can delight in a child's newfound talents and skills. Empathy and empathic attunement is defined as "understanding so intimate that the feelings thoughts and motives of one are readily comprehended by another" (Baker & Baker, 1985, p. 2). Kohut argued that optimal 'empathic failures' in selfobject responsiveness are essential to building internal structures. These failures are gradual and do not traumatize the emerging self, but result in transmuting internalizations (*i.e.,* the process by which the interaction between the self and selfobject stimulates the development of self structure), through which external functions performed by caregivers become internal self functions. Kohut felt empathic failures were inevitable and necessary for the course of healthy development. However, the timing and extensiveness of the failure determines the severity and type of pathology (Mitchell & Black, 1995).

Ideally, the mother provides "phase-appropriate maternal responses" of echoing, reflecting, approving, and admiring which confirm the child's grandiose-expansive self, which optimally lead to normal maturational steps whereby the child internalizes the grandiosity and exhibitionism. These internalizations of grandiosity, exhibitionism, and omnipotence transform when the parents accept and enjoy these aspects of the child's personality. This transformation and internalization gradually result in the ability to pursue self-syntonic ambitions and goals, create the capacity to enjoy various activities, and attainment of realistic and stable self-esteem. (Wolf, 1988, p. 19)

Furthermore, "the individual develops an enhanced capacity for empathy, humor and creative activity, greater acceptance of transience of life and even a quality of wisdom" from obtaining this particular selfobject need (Wolf, 1988, p. 20).

Idealized Parental Imago

The second pole, or the idealized parental imago and the idealizing selfobjects, came out of Kohut's theory that children need to see their caregivers as idealized people; sources of perfection and power who transfer the feelings of being secure and soothed in a relationship (Kohut, 1971). The idealized parental imago represents the child's experiences of merger with an idealized object. Kohut theorized that the idealized parental imago or the narcissistic developmental line of the parental imago, is one of the two "systems of perfection" that forms as a consequence to disturbances which occur in the infant's primary narcissism (Wolf, 1988, p. 18). This selfobject requires the child finds an idealized selfobject who makes the child feel calm, hopeful, and strong. The experience helps the child see strength and wonder outside of themselves. Kohut theorized that in order to maintain the originally perfect omnipotence and

sense of unity with the mother figure, the infant either invests the caregiver with absolute perfection and omnipotent power or does so for the rudimentary self (Kohut, 1971). By placing an idealized connection to the caregiver/attachment figure, the child integrates feelings of calmness and order that translate into feelings of cohesion and safety.

Twinship Pole

Kohut's last selfobject pole is the alter ego/twinship pole, which he developed in his later writings. This pole, Kohut theorized, emerged out of an understanding that individuals need to feel that there are others in the world who are similar to them to feel whole. The alter ego personality needs a relationship with a similar other to confirm reality and the existence for the self (Mitchell & Black, 1995). When the selfobject needs of twinship are met, an individual experiences a sense of belonging, security, and legitimacy (Togashi & Kottler, 2012). Togashi and Kottler found that within the twinship or alter ego pole, were seven different aspects or notions of twinship:

> (1) twinship as something between merger and mirroring, (2) twinship as a process of mutual finding, (3) twinship as a sense of belonging, (4) twinship as a way of passing on talents and skills to the next generation, (5) twinship in silent communication, (6) twinship as a sense of being a human among other human beings, and (7) twinship in trauma. (Togashi & Kottler, 2012, p. 331)

Selfobject Failures

Kohut believed that "where these poles in the bipolar self are undeveloped or development isn't good enough, the result is considerable vulnerability in structure of the self, difficulty maintaining self-esteem, self-cohesion and a sense of self-continuity" (Wolf, 1988, p. 39). If the child "receives reflection from an attachment figure of excessive criticism, hostility or

indifference, this inhibits the child's growth of sense of self worth and assertiveness" (Wolf, 1988, p. 40). Kohut believed that wherever there is repeated selfobject failure regarding any of the three poles, an individual forms "rigidly held ideals and the inevitable, repeated experiences of failing to life up to them, causing shame" (Wolf, 1988, p. 24). Where an individual regresses from state of cohesion to full or partial loss of structure, this is experienced as a loss of self-esteem, a feeling of emptiness, worthlessness, and/or anxiety (Wolf, 1988). These concerns led to Kohut's theorizing on narcissism, the developmental line of healthy narcissism to pathological narcissism, and its treatment.

Definition and Treatment of Narcissism

Kohut believed that difficulties in patients with narcissism were related to "problems in early development rather than issues of conflict" (Mitchell & Black, 1995, p. 158). Where an individual's development of a cohesive self was disrupted, healthy narcissism would transition into pathological narcissism (Mitchell & Black, 1995). Kohut reflected that in individuals with healthy narcissism, there would be a sense of internal solidarity, ability to harness talents, and a reliable self-esteem that was resilient to failure (Mitchell & Black, 1995).

Kohut (1971) believed there were two developmental lines. One line developed object relations and the other was the line of narcissism or development of the self (Fossage, 2009, p. 4). He saw narcissism as a spectrum from autoeroticism, to narcissism, to mature narcissism (Wolf, 1988). Kohut reconceptualized narcissism as existing on a continuum from healthy to pathological (Wolf, 1988). Healthy narcissism to Kohut meant that an individual had developed self-confidence and self-esteem in conjunction with growth-promoting relationships. "Kohut believed the maturation of narcissism involves the acceptance of one's dependence on and interdependence with one's selfobject milieu" (Wolf, 1988, p. 20). Kohut strongly disagreed with

Freud's conception of narcissism as a stage that must be outgrown, and also disagreed with Freud's belief that narcissism inhibits an individual's ability to love, as narcissism was the failure to progress from self-love to object love (the ability to invest in others)(Wolf, 1988). To Kohut, it was clear from the outset that patients with narcissistic tendencies could be characterized by a specific vulnerability regarding their self-esteem (Kohut & Wolf, 1978). Kohut believed instead that narcissism developed in tandem with object love rather than in opposition to it.

Kohut defined pathological narcissism as existing in individuals with inordinate self-preoccupation, difficulties in regulating self-confidence, self-esteem and possibly self-cohesion (Kohut & Wolf, 1978). He theorized that these characteristics stemmed from failing to satisfy the selfobject needs, which created reactive defense formations. Thus, to Kohut, individuals with pathological narcissism had highly unstable self-concepts, grandiose fantasies of self-importance, senses of entitlement, and the inability to experience others outside seeing them as need-gratifying providers (Kohut & Wolf, 1978). Pathological narcissism symptomology meant evidence of vulnerability to feelings of shame, or humiliation: attempts to show grandiosity, devaluation of others and sense of entitlement as a means to protect themselves from feeling ashamed or humiliated (Kohut & Wolf, 1978).

Self Psychology Empirical Studies

Although the researcher was unable to find specific empirical studies utilizing Self psychology treatments with Black women regarding issues of narcissism and/or selfies, studies touch upon issues of creativity, race, culture, and racial violence through the lens of Self psychology. Although Kohut may not have considered the ways in which his Self psychology theories might apply to Black women around issues of self-definition, self-esteem, or self-love,

his concepts of self and selfobjects provide differing perspectives on diagnosis of pathological

narcissism as well as ways in which loss of culture or lack of mirroring of racial identity in

mainstream American may be a causative factor in an individual's struggle for a cohesive self.

Self Psychology and the Cultural Selfobject

Sheppard discusses Kohut's concept of the cultural selfobject and issues of mirroring for

Black women in the United States.

> At the time of his death, Kohut was only just beginning to explore the territory of
>
> cultural experiences and their significance for self and group cohesion….His view
>
> of culture was that it served to facilitate group cohesion by expressing the deepest
>
> longings, sufferings, and celebrations of the group. This experience of culture he
>
> labeled 'cultural selfobjects' which he understood as those creative persons in
>
> 'religion, philosophy, art, and the sciences' who are in 'empathic contact with the
>
> illness of the group self and, through their work...mobilize the unfulfilled
>
> narcissistic needs and point the way toward vital change. (Sheppard, 2008, p. 242-
>
> 243)

Sheppard posits the ways in which Kohut's concepts of selfobjects, self, and mirroring can be

viewed through the lens of Black women's lives: "If it is the mirroring that brings about 'self,'

what happens to the development of subjectivity when the source for mirroring offers a distorted

and exploited reflection?....What is the relationship of culture and society to mirroring and the

development of a cohesive self?" (Sheppard, 2008, p. 235) Sheppard examines the impact on

African-American women who mourn the loss of mirroring in their communities and

development of a cohesive self. "[Kohut] suggested that 'cultural imagoes' have a role in the

celebration of the self that is part of group belonging, and that this experience may function for

the individual (and group) as a developmental step toward the formation of a cohesive self"
(Sheppard, 2008, p. 243). Thus, Black women continue to be portrayed in a negative light where
they do not receive mirroring or where mirroring is distorted.

> Mirroring—or what is reflected back—is the sexualized and distorted racialized
> version (representation) in the gazer's eyes. What we see reflected in the gazer's
> eyes teaches us about 'race, gender, and social class without obvious teaching or
> conscious learning' and these images 'grafted onto existing social institutions are
> so pervasive...black women's portrayal as the Other persists. (Sheppard, 2008, p.
> 247)

Kohut remarked on his theory of the cultural selfobject, explaining as "[t]hey feel strong and
cohesive as members of a group of people whom they experience as being in essence like them,
doing similar work, sharing similar biases and predilections, and the like" (Kohut, 1984, p. 52).
Moreover, "[t]he support that our self derives from…nonverbalized experiences of sameness, of
identity, arises whether or not we get an actual help from those whom we feel are like us" (Kohut,
1984, p. 227). For Kohut's cultural selfobject concept, one's self can become cohesive merely
from experiencing sameness regardless of group identity or involvement.

Similarly, Antokoletz in her research adds to Sheppard's perspective on the importance
of Kohut's concept of the cultural selfobject.

> Cultural groups continue to serve mirroring and idealizing functions throughout a
> person's life by supplying culturally accepted ways of gaining recognition and
> approval from other group members as well as offering cultural ideals that the
> individual can embrace to experience a sense of power and transcendence.
> (Antokoletz, 1993, p. 42)

Kohut suggested the need to investigate the selfobject needs during life tasks or transitions, including times when individuals shift to new cultural milieus that deprive a person of his "cultural selfobject". In order to sustain the cohesive one "needs an environment that provides mirroring and acceptance, and opportunities to feel united with sources of calmness, strength, and availability of others with whom he can experience essential likeness" (Antokoletz, 1993, p. 44). Where Freud might argue that conflict arising from lack of cultural mirroring is an expression of intrapsychic conflict, Kohut would argue the "lack of availability to the mirroring and idealizable functions of cultural selfobjects represents a challenge to the integrative capacities of the patient undergoing the process and must be recognized" (Antokoletz, 1993, p. 48). Furthermore, where patients seem ambivalent towards the new cultural environment, there needs to be understanding and validation of the devaluation of possible negative mirroring experienced in the new receiving culture (Antokoletz, 1993).

In 2011, Manuel implemented Self psychology principles to a self-expression group for Black adolescents, finding in his work that participants "often attempted to have unmet selfobject needs fulfilled in therapy through experiences with me as their therapist, and with one another" (Manuel, 2011, p. 29). He found the participants sought out opportunities to exhibit their talent and receive recognition and praise:

> They looked to one another for validation and twinship. At times, they were boastful; and sometimes they shared stories and checked with their peers to see if they shared the same conclusions on subjects. My taking a self psychological perspective allowed for the illumination of their unmet selfobject needs and the facilitation of selfobject experiences in group. (Manuel, 2011, p. 29)

Self Psychology to Explain Racial Myths

Whisett & Whisett (2008) explored anti-Black racism within the self psychology lens to assess whether the theoretical framework helped understand origins of racial myths, stereotypes, and consequences of racism. In particular, Whisett & Whisett argue that through a self psychology paradigm, racial violence (*i.e.,* racism, stereotyping, racial myths) can be identified as a form of narcissistic rage that results from failure of attunement from selfobjects. Their research finds there is a desire for racial justice, racial violence takes on a narcissistic rage that differs from other forms of aggression whereby it "is the need for revenge, for righting a wrong, for undoing a hurt by whatever means…" (Kohut, 1978, p. 380). Whisett &Whisett used the example of the Rodney King riots to argue that were the legal system to be considered an omnipotent selfobject, Black Americans experienced the judicial decision in Mr. King's case as a major empathic failure on the part of the selfobject as it confirmed the fear that they had no control over the institutions that run their lives (Whisett & Whisett, 2008). Therefore, through this use of self psychology, it can be elucidated that many different forms of racism and oppression may be experienced as selfobject failures, negatively impeding the development of a cohesive self.

Self Psychology and Creative Expression

Warner (2013) researched use of self psychology in art, exploring Kohut's beliefs of the connection between narcissism and creativity. However, Warner explains in other theories of creativity, an artist's obsession with their art is seen as a regressive narcissistic process (Warner, 2013, p. 6). "Kohut's thoughts on creativity followed fluidly from his formulations of the self. As Kohut found narcissism to exist on a normative line of development separate from object love, this theory freed artists from being analyzed as creative expression being regressive. "Instead,

the intensity of self-focus necessary and available to an artist becomes an asset" (Warner, 2013, p. 68). Warner identified similarities between defining creative expression and pathological definitions of narcissism.

> In other words (to use Kohut's early terminology inherited from Freudian tradition), the artist's work is invested with narcissistic libido, which is an expression not of object love but of narcissistically experienced attachment. Given that self-relatedness and object-relatedness are valued as equal components of a healthy self, the work that comes from an artist's self-immersion is not, by definition, regression, but a transformation (Warner, 2013, p. 69)….For patient and artist alike, the freedom to turn oneself loose in the consulting room or art studio without undue self-criticism or fear of judgment or irreparable misunderstanding, is key to communicating personal truth effectively, whether the medium be words, gestures, or paint. The use of selfobject transference is one way that the risk of self-expression can be worked through, eventually facilitating a shift to a more sustained sense of confidence. (Warner, 2013, p. 72)

In spaces or communities where selfies are considered a form of self-portrait or artistic expression, Warner's research helps reframe the artistic process not as pathologically narcissistic but as transformative.

Conclusion

Kohut created a psychodynamic theory that reconfigured the concept of self as the essence of being and on developing treatment that serves to help patients develop a stronger level of cohesion of self-structure. Kohut theorized that certain forms of narcissism are fundamental to healthy development. More specifically, Kohut found that all individuals have ongoing

narcissistic needs that persist throughout the lifespan. Kohut's theories of the tripartite self, particularly the focus on the twinship selfobject and cultural selfobject, provide context to understanding the ways in which individuals may lack strong self-definition or sense of self based on lack of mirroring at the intrapersonal, interpersonal, or structural level, which has ongoing negative implications. Self psychology supports how creative expression is not unhealthy self-expression but a service of transformation. Lastly, these concepts will help to further explore the phenomenon of natural hair selfies for Black women as a potential cultural selfobject need and a form developing healthy narcissism.

CHAPTER V

Discussion

This thesis set out to investigate the phenomenon of Black women posting selfies of their natural hair process on social media sites, primarily Instagram and Facebook, to explore whether selfie culture generally indicates narcissistic tendencies or whether certain types of selfies have alternative implications including self-exploration, improving self-esteem, or as a community-seeking strategy. This discussion chapter will examine different means of interpretation of the phenomenon—specifically whether this phenomenon provides a gateway for identity construction and self-presentation for Black women. As Black women lack mirroring within the greater mainstream American society, use of social media may increase or promote self-esteem, self-concept, and empower them at the intrapsychic and interpersonal level.

Black Feminist Theory was used as a lens to examine natural hair selfies as a way to incorporate the complexity in understanding identity for Black women, and how the concept of intersectionality deepens the conversation, and provides alternative perspectives on why Black women may tend to post selfies of their natural hair process. Similarly, use of self psychology and Kohut's theories of the tripartite self were included in the discussion to help explore how narcissism can be considered part of healthy development, and the importance of selfobjects—such as the twinship and cultural selfobject—to help individuals develop a cohesive self. It is through these theoretical frameworks the phenomenon might depict complex narratives outside current research findings.

Historical and Racial Factors in History of Psychonanalysis

Given racist tendencies prevalent in American psychiatric history, is it appropriate to use psychoanalysis as a universal technique and theory that may be applied across cultures? Borossa believes that psychoanalysis "rest[s] on Western social patterns, such as the Oedipus complex…bear[ing] all the hallmarks of a colonialism of the psyche" (Borossa, 2007, p. 113). hooks similarly argues that it is not appropriate to simply "take white critical texts of psychoanalysis and superficially transpose them onto black life" (hooks, 1999, p. 227). hooks calls for psychoanalysts to "do more research and generate theory which is inclusive, sensitive and understanding of black history and culture" (hooks, 1999, p. 227). Foster argues that culture plays a crucial role in shaping the self. Moreover, "the DSM-IV TR notes that people who have recently immigrated may appear to have diagnosable personality disorders when, in fact, they are simply expressing personality traits common to their country of origin" (Foster et al., 2003, p. 469-470). For example, "DSM-IV TR notes that people who have recently immigrated may appear to have diagnosable personality disorders when, in fact, they are simply expressing personality traits common to their country of origin" (American Psychological Association, 2000). It is important when framing this discussion to provide complexity and problematize the use of certain theoretical framework as these lenses may not fully allow understanding of the richness of the subject matter.

Narcissism: NPD versus Sub-Clinical Narcissism

At the core of the debate around selfie culture is the analysis of whether use of social networking sites such as Instagram or Facebook promote and/or increase narcissism in American society. Although the DSM-V has a specific narcissistic personality disorder (NPD) diagnosis, there is also what is considered the "sub-clinical" or "normal" narcissism. This type of

narcissism, researchers explain, may display some characteristics of NPD identified in the DSM;

however, may not meet all requirements of the diagnosis (Campbell, Rudich, & Sedikies, 2002;

Sedikides, Rudich, Gregg, Kumashiro, & Rusbult, 2004). This definition of narcissism is

characterized by a highly positive or inflated view of the self, use of range of intrapersonal and

interpersonal strategies to maintain positive self-views, response to critical feedback with anger

and self-enhancing attributes, having relationships that lack in commitment and caring, and being

derogative towards those who provide threatening feedback (Campbell et. al, 2002; Sedikides et.

al, 2004). Additionally, individuals with this type of narcissism perceive themselves as more

intelligent and creative, and exhibit defensive self-esteem in that they seek admiration but not

acceptance (Campbell et. al, 2002; Sedikides et. al, 2004). This definition of narcissism is coined

"the personality/social psychological definition" (Twenge, 2003, p. 470), and is possibly a more

realistic concern for researchers to explore (rather than examining whether the general public has

a larger percentage of individuals with diagnosable narcissistic psychopathology) in implications

in social media usage. For the purposes of this thesis, narcissism has been referred to using the

sub-clinical definition.

Healthy Narcissism

Although narcissism tends to be explored from the lens of pathology, there are also, as

Kohut has examined in self psychology, healthy forms of narcissism critical to one's intrapsychic

development (Kohut, 1971). Kohut reconceptualized narcissism as existing on a continuum from

healthy to pathological (Wolf, 1988). Healthy narcissism to Kohut meant that an individual

developed self-confidence in conjunction with growth-promoting relationships. "Kohut believed

the maturation of narcissism involves the acceptance of one's dependence on and

interdependence with one's selfobject milieu" (Wolf, 1988, p. 20). Thus, it is possible that Black

women's posting of selfies may, in accordance with Kohut's beliefs on narcissism, lean towards the healthier side of the narcissistic spectrum. As the individual posts natural hair selfies, she may increasingly develop self-esteem and cohesion of the self through receiving positive mirroring and interacting on social media sites.

Narcissism has been shown to have positive correlations with self-esteem (Emmons, 1984; Jackson, Ervin, & Hodge, 1992; Raskin, Novacek, & Hogan, 1991; Rhodewalt & Morf, 1995; Watson & Biderman, 1993; Watson, Hickman, & Morris, 1996). A large proportion of researchers view high self-esteem as a positive trait; therefore, despite multiple negative qualities of narcissists, narcissists also have several positive characteristics, most importantly high self-esteem (Foster et al., 2003). In a 1999 study by Campbell, an average correlation of .29 was found between narcissism and self-esteem using the results of 11 studies with a total of 2963 participants (Foster et al., 2003). There is also some evidence that narcissism is positively related to openness and negatively related to neuroticism and agreeableness (Campbell &Rudich, 2002). Campbell & Rudich (2002) also found that both narcissists and high self-esteem individuals have positive but distinct self-views, thus questioning which is indicated in social media. Most importantly, they state, "[s]eeing the self as extremely outgoing and clever (but not as moral or nice) portrays a very different individual than seeing the self as nice and moral as well as somewhat clever or intelligent. Those who adopt the former view are narcissists, whereas those who adopt the latter view have high self-esteem" (Campbell & Rudich, 2002, p. 366). Within studies of social media, further research exploring these distinctions may be beneficial.

It is important to consider the discussion of whether an action meets the definition of being narcissistic while examining specific phenomenon such as the use of social media. One

concern and critique of both definitions of narcissism is the lack of examining how culture

influences personality traits and inclusion of these nuances in the use of the narcissistic definition.

Historical Racism in Personality Disorder Diagnoses

Studies seem to lack inclusion of cultural factors as well as historical and structural

racism—*i.e.,* the pathologizing of Black individuals in the history of American psychiatry and its

impact on understanding narcissism today. Thomas and Sillen (1972) comment how in both the

history of Eurocentric psychology and psychiatry "the diagnosis of personality functioning in

Africans has been noxious," particularly in the diagnosis of personality disorder (Thomas &

Sillen, 1972, p. 2). In early Eurocentric practice, diagnoses were given of drapetomania (in

which escape behavior of an enslaved African was considered a disease of the mind) or

dysaesthesia Aethiopica (where resistance to enslavement by an African was seen as a hebetude

of mind) (Thomas & Sillen, 1972, p. 2). Thomas and Sillen raise awareness of the "pernicious

misrepresentation of Africans' psychological functioning," and the purpose of

psychopathologizing Blacks to maintain White supremacy (Thomas and Sillen, 1972, p. 301).

Thomas and Sillen point out, slaves who attempted to escape from their 'good life' were

diagnosed with "drapetomania" or flight from madness (Thomas & Sillen, 1972, p. 301).

Moreover, those who avoided work or destroyed their masters's property were labeled with the

disorder of "dysaethesia aethioptica" (Thomas & Sillen, 1972, p. 301). Thus, although

Eurocentric psychology and psychiatry are considered universally applicable in contemporary

times, it remains important to consider these past diagnoses within this structure that perpetuated

racist propaganda and packaged it as a mental disorder. When exploring whether narcissism is an

accurate statement of what is occurring, it is essential to examining the ways in which narcissism

may have cultural differences. If the behaviors of Black Americans are judged by inappropriate standards and values, this may lead to misdiagnosis and misinterpretation.

Age and Cohort Differences in Narcissistic Traits

Foster et al. (2003) conducted a study examining how age and cohort differences influence the personality construct of narcissism. The research focused on sub-clinical narcissists, specifically examining whether younger people are more narcissistic than older people. The study concluded that personality construct of narcissism changes across the lifespan based on three factors: (1) disorder burnout (*i.e.,* where personality disorders become less evident with age); (2) incorporation of objective failure into one's self-concept (*i.e.,* more experiences of failure during lifespan lessens narcissistic tendencies); and (3) cultural changes creating birth cohort effects (i.e., sociocultural factors impact narcissism). For example, the study points out that younger generations in the United States are growing up in a culture "focused more on self-esteem and individualism. Whereas older people, raised in more collectivistic American eras (e.g., the 1950s), might be less likely to harbor narcissistic traits" (Foster et. al, 2003, p. 472; Twenge (2001), p. 321). Interestingly, research studies looking at differences in narcissistic tendencies based on age do not additionally look at factors of race and cultural differences. Thus, were these studies to incorporate these additional aspects of identity, findings may differ dramatically.

Many theorists have noted the importance of birth cohort as an indicator of historical and cultural change (Twenge & Campbell, 2001). Empirical research has established that birth cohort differences arise in fairly predictable patterns, following shifts in the larger sociocultural environment and find that environment accounts for more difference in personality traits than family environment (Twenge & Campbell, 2001). Additionally, examining cohort differences

for adults over the last 30 years through the self-worth model of self-esteem, Twenge &

Campbell found that during the late 1960s and 1970s baby boom era, popular culture promoted

self-love, which is less prevalent in Generation X. The study concluded that these cohort

differences impacted adult self-concept and individuality (Twenge & Campbell, 2001). For

example, since the late 1960s, cultural indicators relevant to social acceptance and self-esteem

have declined (*i.e.,* increase in divorce rate, birth rate decline, increase in unemployment,

economic hardship, violent crime rates increased, etc.). These factors have been directly linked

to individual differences in children's self-esteem (Twenge & Campbell, 2001). Twenge &

Foster's (2010) research examining birth cohort increases in narcissistic personality traits among

American college students found that generational differences and cultural changes in family life,

media, parenting, and education have shifted toward greater individualism and affect individual

personality traits (Twenge & Foster, 2010). These results are consistent with a 2010

epidemiological study on NPD, which found that out of a sample of 34,653 American

participants examining lifetime prevalence of NPD, only 3.2% of people over 65 had

experienced NPD, compared to 5.6% age 45 to 64, 7.1% age 30-44, and 9.4% of those age 20-29

(Twenge & Foster, 2010, p. 103). Thus, this research further indicates how changes in social

norms in different social cohorts are correlated with narcissistic tendencies.[3]

Cultural and Ethnic Differences in Narcissism

There are different predictions regarding how narcissism might have world, regional, and

ethnic differences. "Indeed, many authors have argued that culture strongly influences our

---

[3] It is important to note that the sample was taken from a four-year college and no information

was provided regarding the demographics of the sample. Thus, it is unknown what differences

exist within the sample as well as whether the sample can be generalized to a broader population.

personalities and views of self. Even within a single country, culture may influence people to define themselves quite differently" (Foster, 2002, p. 470). Foster's research revealed significant differences among four ethnic identity groups (White, Black, Asian, Hispanic) (Foster, 2002). Foster found that world regions that generally displayed higher individualism also reported somewhat greater levels of narcissism (Foster et al., 2003). Twenge and Crocker (2002) concluded in their study that race differences in self-esteem stem primarily from cultural conceptions of individualism, and although the precise antecedents of self-esteem and narcissism are not known, race and birth cohort differences in each imply a strong link with individualism. Thus, cultures that emphasize individualism and independence are likely to produce more narcissism among their members (Foster et al., 2003). In the process of finding ways for research to be more inclusive of culture and other aspects of formulating diagnosis is the issue of whether universalism serves some purpose and/or is necessary to offset possible political dangers of cultural relativism (Borossa, 2007). Yet, where research does not include these essential aspects of identity, any diagnosis may lead to inaccurate or misapplied case formulation and treatment.

Social Media Usage: Narcissism or Self-Esteem?

In examining the phenomenon of selfies in social media usage, both narcissism and self-esteem may influence one's self-presentation (Mehdizadeh, 2010). This distinction between narcissism and self-esteem is important to explore as discussion around correlation between increased narcissism and social media usage may be better explained when considering the similarities between narcissism and high self-esteem. "In recent years, the popular press has advanced the notion that social networking sites (SNS) and narcissism are tightly linked. However, the research examining the relationship between narcissism and social networking has yielded modest and somewhat inconsistent findings" (Lasen & Gomez-Cruz, 2009, p. 212) Particularly for Black women, concern in understanding whether observed behavior should be

categorized as self-esteem or narcissism is crucial to appropriately catalog, as it has significant implications for diagnosis and treatment. Foster argues in her research that because individualistic thinking is likely positively associated with increased narcissism, "the fact that the ethnic differences in self-esteem correspond directly to levels of individualism should mean that narcissism will follow a similar pattern" (Foster, 2002, p. 473). One argument Foster includes regarding findings of increased narcissistic tendencies among Blacks is related to studies that mask important cultural and regional differences and cites research Plaut et al. conducted in different regions in the United States. For example, Plaut et al. (2002), found that people from the West South Central region report being more self-confident and outspoken whereas people from New England report being softhearted and caring, indicating that self-concepts may indicate certain constructs such as narcissism that vary significantly from region to region (Foster, 2002, p. 473).

Narcissism vs. Self-Esteem

One major distinction between narcissism and self-esteem is that narcissism is relatively detrimental to interpersonal relationships while self-esteem may be beneficial (Campbell & Rudich, 2002). Campbell and Rudich conducted research in 2002 predicting that although both narcissists and individuals with high self-esteem (HSE) both have positive self-views, these groups view self-views in different ways. Specifically, narcissists' self-conceptions reflect agentic concerns (*i.e.,* an egoistic bias part of the agentic value system that includes inflated self-views in the domains of extraversion, openness, and intelligence) whereas HSE individuals' self-conceptions have both agentic and communal concerns (*i.e.,* moralistic bias part of the communal value system that includes inflated self-views of agreeableness, conscientiousness, and morality) (Campbell & Rudich, 2002, p. 358).

When factoring in racial and cultural differences, Twenge and Crocker (2002) confirmed

in a meta-analysis of self-esteem and ethnic identity findings of a self-esteem continuum, with

Blacks reporting the highest self-esteem, followed by Whites. Hispanics, Asians, and American

Indians reported the lowest self-esteem. These results also corresponded exactly to the

comparative levels of individualism among these groups, suggesting that narcissism might show

a similar pattern (Foster et al., 2003). Contrary to statements made by Collins, Foster's research

found that on the self-esteem continuum, Blacks reported the highest levels of self-esteem,

followed by Whites, which corresponded to comparative levels of individualism among these

groups (Foster, 2002, p. 473). Although this research may support studies showing direct

correlation of social media usage and narcissism, it is important to note that the creation of racial

categories in this particular study did not specify "Black" to mean "African-American." Instead,

this study included Black participants from all parts of the world, meaning racial categorization

did not account for possible cultural differences in usage or narcissistic traits.

Narcissism and Self-Esteem in Black Women

This distinction between narcissism versus self-esteem in usage of social media,

specifically in posting of selfies is important to grapple with considering the issues of self-esteem

in Black communities. Self-esteem and strong body image continues to be a struggle for many

Black women given the psychological implications of historical racial oppression that have

lasting effects within the Black community (Johnson & Bankhead, 2014). If Black women have

higher ratings of narcissism or self-esteem, further research might be needed to assess whether

the large influx in either may be related to historical sociocultural factors. For example, if a

community has been unable to have positive self-concepts for decades, might it be possible that

in a new era where there is space to have self-esteem, that individuals may overemphasize or

flaunt their newfound identity? Are these differences indication of a cohort difference in individualism or promotion of collective identity (or neither)?

It is interesting to note the concern and labeling of the new positive self-identity and self-esteem for Blacks as being pathological in nature. Most importantly, "[g]iven the politics of black life in this white supremacist society it makes sense that internalized racism and self-hate stand in the way of love" (hooks, 1999, p. 18). Therefore, the question should be asked, given these "[s]ystems of domination" that "exploit folks best when they deprive us of our capacity to experience our own agency and alter our ability to care and to love ourselves," might there still be ongoing attempts to oppression Black women and use of selfies and social media is the new platform for criticism (hooks, 1999, p. 18). Might we continue to call "for the kind of affirmation, ideals, and belonging that can support the development of strong selves, selves with a sense of continuity, with empathy for self and other, and with self-esteem that can sustain black women through the joys and sorrows of their lives" (Rector, 2013, p. 7-1-7-4). Although the practice of self-love is difficult for everyone in a capitalistic society such as the United States, "it is even more difficult for black folks, as we must constantly resist the negative perceptions of blackness we are encouraged to embrace by the dominant culture" (hooks, 1999, p. 18).

Natural Hair Selfies: Narcissistic or Self-Love?

A specific exploration of the relationship between use of social media in relation to narcissism or self-esteem can be examined in the process of selfie portraits of Black women's natural hair process. Currently, there is a growing trend among Black women to return to their "natural roots" and eliminate the use of chemical relaxers, which is explored in social media networking sites through postings of selfies as well as other forms of communication. Today, Black women choose to transition to natural hair both for political and practical reasons. Johnson

& Bankhead (2014) argue, [f]or many, it is less about a political statement and more about self-acceptance and the opportunity to embrace their natural tresses in its natural, unaltered state" (Johnson & Bankhead, 2014, p. 93). For Black women, hair "continues to indicate social and economic status and for some even a woman's character and personality" (Johnson & Bankhead, 2014, p. 90).

For those for whom wearing their hair naturally is a political statement, their process is rooted in both current or historical socio-political implications of natural hair (Johnson & Bankhead, 2014). For example, "[i]n 2007, Glamour magazine editor, Ashley Baker, gave a presentation entitled "The do's and don'ts of Corporate Fashion," to over 40 lawyers in New York City. The first 'don't' slide depicted a Black woman with an Afro, with the caption 'say no to the fro'. She then commented, 'As for dreadlocks: How truly dreadful!' (Johnson & Bankhead, 2014, p. 90-91) These are blatant racist statements and thus for some women, the choice to 'go natural' is in direct response (or begins in direct response) to these types of comments.

Research conducted by Chapman speaks to Black women's experiences of racism through their hair styling. Historically, the Afro is considered symbolic of political resistance of White supremacy and thus found unacceptable to be work appropriate (Chapman, 2007). Chapman conducted research interviewing 20 Black identified women from different cultural backgrounds (Continental African, African Caribbean, African American, biracial) to investigate African and European cultural influences on Black ideas about beauty, hair, and identity. She found that Black women's hair is subjugated to restriction and rules that Black men do not likely confront. For example, one participant recalls being asked "to get rid of her vibrant red Afro" (Chapman, 2007, p. 68). Another participant was told that her Afro was "too out there"

(Chapman, 2007, p. 68). In another setting, a participant who was a schoolteacher was informed that she was able to wear her natural hair as long as it was "neat" (Chapman, 2007, p. 68).

> I still felt like I should feel self-conscience about my hair in certain settings, so the natural hair community was helpful that way. Like, you know, it's ok to have, like the way our hair is, it's ok, and you don't need a relaxer in order to be beautiful, in order to be fashionable, in order to be professional. So, that's why, that's what I've appreciated and gotten from the online natural hair care community. (Moore, 2014, p. 27)

These examples demonstrate a dominate message that if a Black woman is working in a corporate setting, it is assumed that she will follow the ascribed standards based on European social norms. Furthermore, as expressed by Cooper, Black women's bodies continue to be disciplined and corrected in personal and professional environments (Cooper, 2014).

Women and Social Media: Narcissistic or Self-Affirming?

Self-esteem and social media for women, generally speaking, is a debate in itself. Some argue that women's use of social media and posting of selfies merely is a form of self-objectification, whereas another camp argues that use of social networking sites and selfies can be a form of empowerment. For example, in her YouTube video "The Selfie Revolution", Laci Green, a 23-year old American video- blogger suggests that posting selfies gives women an opportunity to define themselves instead of having other people define them. She states that the selfie can improve a women's self-esteem (Wrammert, 2014, p. 3). However, on the other side, Swedish columnist Hanna Hellquist criticizes selfies, arguing it merely reproduces the standard images of women. According to Hellquist, it doesn't matter if western women of today have been given the tool to define themselves—they still do it in the same smiling, good-looking

manners as before. In other words, when women use the new digital technology they continue to reproduce the standard oppressive norms of what it means to be a woman (Wrammert, 2014). Similarly, Lasen & Gomez-Cruz address how

> [t]he possibilities both for a liberating performance of gender and sexuality and for victimhood via female objectification have been extensively rehearsed in discussions about responsibility and virtue involving selfies of young women….However, it is important to resist overly simple emancipatory narratives that conflate use of a self-documenting technology with self-awareness. (Lasen & Gomez-Cruz, 2009, p. 206-207)

Another perspective might be to consider Audre Lorde's historical statement "for the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (Lorde, 1984, p. 110-114). She posits whether use of social media to create safe space for women is a "process of visionary thinking" and a means for women and any exploited or oppressed group to avoid being complicit "in structures of domination, using power in ways that reinforce rather than challenge or change" (hooks, 1988, p. 36-37).

Cultural Differences in Online Self-Presentation

Even though taking and posting selfies is a global phenomenon, cultural background and values influence online self-presentation (Kim & Papacharissi, 2003). Although the "self" has gained more power through for example social media, there are other factors than just technology influencing the way we express ourselves online (Wrammert, 2007). It is not the technological capacity that decides our activities online—it is the socio-structural context (Wrammert, 2007). Social structures—values, traditions and cultural codes—play a significant role in the way users of internet and social media express and display themselves (Wrammert,

2007). For example, Korean users tend to present themselves through personal homepages and are more likely to use agents, such as cartoon images and media heroes to express themselves online, rather than presenting themselves through a selfie (Kim & Papacharissi, 2013). In contrast, American participants use more personal-related and non-manipulated photos (Wrammert, 2007). Thus, research shows that cultural differences in online self-presentation exist and are affected by societal structures (Wrammert, 2007).

Social Media: Self-Identity Exploration

Within the discussion of the different meanings in usage of selfies includes considering whether individuals may use selfies as a means to explore self-identity. Identity is an important part of one's self-concept (Mehdizadeh, 2010). One's conception of self can include a "now self" as well as a "possible self" (Mehdizadeh, 2010, p. 358). One can develop identity both through a public process of announcing one's identity and/or through the process of others placing and claiming an individual's identity (Mehdizadeh, 2010). Therefore, the process of selfies may include both individual and collective identity formation. When it comes to tradition and identity, Thompson suggests that both forces shape one's identity (Thompson, 1995). According to Thompson, self-identity is the image that people have about themselves as individuals, including certain characters and capacities. In contrast, the collective identity is the idea that people have of themselves as a being part of a social group—the feeling of belonging in a group with it's own history and meaning (Thompson, 1995). According to Thompson, both the self-identity and the collective identity are formed in the social context. Moreover, a person's identity is shaped out of values, opinions, and behaviors from the past (Wrammert, 2007).

In exploring the impact of the process of posting a selfie, it is important to consider differences in self-presentation in relation to usage of different social media sites. For example,

in usage of Instagram, one may develop either or both a "now self" and a "possible self" either through announcing these connections (through selecting certain hashtags) or by others placing your image in certain sectors of Instagram (through liking or sharing the image through other hashtags). Where the possible self is created and displayed in nonymous social media forums—such as Instagram—where accountability is lacking, individuals can present their "true self" more readily (Mehdizadeh, 2010).

Facebook is an example of a social media site where one's identity is anchored through institutions, residences, mutual friends, and so forth. Thus in this type of social media platform, postings are tied to reality. Nonymous sites, in contrast, "provide an ideal environment for the expression of the hoped-for possible self, a subgroup of the possible-self" (Mehdizadeh, 2010, p. 358). Wendt's theories add to the understanding of the self-exploration through use of selfies. "It is as if we create selfies to search for an ideal version of ourselves and, in this process, we 'seek to exhaust the photographic program by realizing all [our] possibilities'. Perhaps we are afraid that our images – our selves – will run out and therefore we produce selfies in excess" (Wendt, 2014, p.7-8).

Further complicating the conversation on the benefits, drawbacks, and meaning underlying the process of the selfie, Wendt (2014) raises additional complexity in the metadata attached to the image (*i.e.,* the hashtags).

> The self-portrait is no longer comprised of visual representation alone; it also includes fragments of metadata that we assign to it. Our hashtags have become as important as our selfies, and we may view identity as simple as we describe it via hashtags. Although the hashtag enables us to share images efficiently, it does not enable us to contemplate images. As we seem to be confronted with more images

than words on a daily basis, it seems remiss, as a society, to discount the influence

that hashtags have on self-expression and identity. (Wendt, 2014, p. 37)

If some theorists and researchers believe selfies are akin to personal diaries or self-portraits, what

then does the requirement of placing hashtags to sort the images add to the conversation?

For some individuals who seem to utilize forums such as Instagram or Facebook not for

apparent connection but to appear popular or successful, it seems reasonable to explore

possibilities such as NPD underlying the choice to post multiple selfies. Wendt proposes that an

individual's fear of loss of identity causes the desire to overly-produce the selfie, which may in

fact promote the theory that use of social media promotes or supports narcissistic tendencies and

reduces one's self-esteem. In usage of social media and narcissism, one research study found that

narcissistic individuals tend to use social relationships to help regulate their narcissistic esteem,

using relationships to appear popular and successful and are solely pursued when an opportunity

for public glory presents itself (Mehdizadeh, 2010). Thus, social media sites seem like fertile

ground for narcissists to self-regulate as a "gateway for hundreds of shallow relationships and

emotional detachment" (Mehdizadeh, 2010, p.358). For example, Wendt speculates "[p]erhaps,

our preoccupation with Instagram is simple: it offers us infinite versions of ourselves, as though

each picture promises a better version" (Wendt, 2014, p. 8). It is also a highly controlled

environment that allows users to have complete power over their self-presentation (Mehdizadeh,

2010). However, for others, posting may simply be the process of expressing different types of

self— possible self, true self, or otherwise.

it can function as a type of image, as an action, or as a self-referential pronoun.

#selfie also functions as a type of self-categorization and it appears to confirm

users' identities to themselves….But #selfie only refers to the user when he or she

is viewing his or her profile image page. Once a user's selfie is aggregated to

Instagram's larger image network, it becomes part of a #selfie group" thus

possibly changing the meaning from a process of individuality to group identity.

(Wendt, 2014, p. 31)

It is possible that when selfies are aggregated, it creates a community or safe space for Black

women. This is important to consider when analyzing selfies because it suggests that the

meaning of an individual selfie shifts when the photos are aggregated, changing or enhancing

their meaning. Moreover, it may provide space for people to display their hoped-for possible

selves, which may increase one's self-esteem (Mehdizadeh, 2010). Although points made by

Mehdizadeh focus on the reality of the shallow depth of relationship-forming accessible through

social media sites, for women seeking boosts to self-esteem, it is feasible that what is not needed

is depth in a relationship, but mirroring. "There are many ways of receiving confirmation. On

Instagram, however, every uploaded picture ends up on the individual's profile and is then

expected to obtain acceptance in form of "likes." In a way, it can be said that Instagram is about

increasing one's personal self-esteem along with establishing an identity online" (Garsbo &

Sorensson, 2014, p. 43).

Taking selfies may be interpreted as a process of constructing personal and group

memory, creating and maintaining social relationships, self-expression, and self-presentation

(Garsbo & Sorensson, 2014). For some, taking selfies is a form of storytelling that can be used

akin to a personal diary where, through sharing photos, individuals share their point of view of

the world (Garsbo & Sorensson, 2014). Van House et al. (2005) found that the photographs taken

by the camera phone capture complex information that more easily can be described with a

photograph than through writing (Garsbo & Sorensson, 2014, 26-27). As Lasen and Gomez-

Cruz state "self-representations must, by definition, be mediated, the challenge that is connoted by the claim that someone is 'doing it for themselves' does not turn out to be at all straightforward—self-representations, to borrow Perkin's phrase, 'do do political work' " (Lasen & Gomez-Cruz, 2009, p. 211). Mirroring and support may be as simple as someone "liking" your photo, or by seeing photos of other women across the country posting photos that are similar to yours. In this sense, these aspects and uses of Instagram or Facebook may further clarify how Black women who post selfies post not to feed their narcissistic needs but to build their self-identity.

> [A]n individual is free to create any variety of possible selves, yet the pool of possible selves derives from the categories made salient by the individual's particular socio-cultural and historical context and from the models, images, and symbols provided by the media and by the individual's immediate social experiences. Thus, the individual is very complex and may possess a variety of different selves and a variety of possible and ideal selves. A possible self may also be something that an individual is afraid of becoming. (Garsbo, Sorenson, & Whitberg, 2014, p. 23)

Redefining the Black Woman: Natural Hair Selfies and Mirroring

As Patricia Hill Collins and many others note, Black women have multiple negative stereotypes applied to them including the mammies, jezebels, Aunt Jemimas, welfare queens, breeder women of slavery, and on and on. All of the above perpetuate Black women's oppression (Collins, 1990). Hill explains "[f]or many African-American women, racism is not something that exists in the distance" and this concept stated in the 1990s can still be applied today (Collins, 1990, p. 23). Collins emphasizes,

stereotypical images of Black womanhood take on special meaning. Because the

authority to define societal values is a major instrument of power, elite groups, in

exercising power, manipulate ideas about Black womanhood. They do so by

exploiting already existing symbols, or creating new ones. (Collins, 1990, p. 23)

For example, currently there is the concept of the "T.H.O.T" (THOT stands for that ho over

there) currently being promoted in contemporary rap and hip-hop culture, now making its way

into mainstream urban vernacular (O'Neal, 2015). "These controlling images are designed to

make racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of social injustice appear to be natural, normal,

and inevitable parts of everyday life" (Collins, 1990, p. 69) and also maintain a constant,

sometimes unspoken, distorted view of Black women as their true identities are "rendered

invisible through the depersonalization of racism" (hooks, 1984, p. 42). Stereotypes such as

T.H.O.T renders Black women invisible as full human beings. Paradoxically, Collins notes, these

stereotypes render Black women as invisible Others but places them in "an outsider-within

position" (Collins, 1990, p. 100). Spaces on social media sites where Black women self-define

may help to counteract these stereotypes and negative conceptions.

Natural Hair Selfies and Mirroring to Redefine and Reclaim

Use of Instagram and Facebook to post images, follow, and comment on Black women's

natural hair selfies in many ways meets the needs of all three poles described by Kohut's

tripartite self. Although Kohut envisioned this process of development occurring in childhood, it

is possible for individuals at any age who may have had selfobject failure, to work towards

healthy development and cohesion of the self through aspects of self psychology. Antokoletz, in

particular discussion of the cultural selfobject, states "Kohut suggested the need to investigate

the selfobject needs that accompany specific life tasks," thus implying that sometimes selfobject needs are required during particular phases of life (Antokoletz, 1993, p. 44).

In particular, it is through Kohut's twinship selfobject, whereby people need to feel that there are others in the world who are similar to them and through mirroring, receive a sense of being human and a likeness to others (Kohut, 1984). Through the selfobject needs, Black women are "driven by ambition, pulled by ideals, and needing to recognize itself in similar others" through the process of engagement with social media (Kohut, 1977). If a woman experiences the 'likes' from posting a selfie as feeling similar to others and finding twinship, she may slowly develop the ability to feel less isolated or 'Other' in the world. When the selfobject needs of twinship are met an individual experiences security, a sense of belonging and legitimacy.

> There would be a lot of times when I would have a lot of doubt, especially when I was transitioning, and like your family members would be telling you like "You're ugly, don't do that". And like, you were never ugly, your hair was never ugly, umm, it was just this issue of like you're just not used to seeing yourself this way. It's basically beaten into you that like your curly kinky hair is bad and that makes you ugly to have curly kinky hair. Umm, like, I felt like it was really helpful to have an outlet- so that was back when I was participating more online. It's to have an outlet to talk to other people who are going through the same thing or women who are older who were going through that in the 70s and just never turned back. So like, that was cool, and I guess I've always felt it's affirming to see people like you. (Moore, 2014, p. 27)

Kohut found in his later work the fundamental nature of the 'cultural selfobject' that he believed to be part of the primary self (Peters, 2010). Kohut described the cultural selfobject as

the sum total of those clusters of interconnected experiences of each individual

that prevail in consequence of his temporary or continuous submersion into the

group— can be conceived of, like the self of the individual, as being laid down

and formed in the energic arc between mirrored selfojbect...greatness and admired

selfobject perfection. (Kohut, 1985, p. 82-83)

Furthermore, "[c]ultural selfobjects are part of the primary self….Therefore, it is accepted that

one's experience of one's self, the I, results from the sociocultural environ, as well as from

interpersonal experiences within the family and/or with other intimates" (Peters, 2010, p. 366).

Similar to the cultural selfobject and how Lasen and Gomez-Cruz conceptualize self-

representation as being a political action involving others, "[a]s each individual African-

American woman changes her ideas and actions, so does the overall shape of power itself

change" (Collins, 1990, p. 275). Sheppard (2008) explores the impact on the lack of twinship

mirroring for Black women and Kohut's theory of the cultural selfobject. "[Kohut] suggested

that 'cultural imagoes' have a role in the celebration of the self that is part of group belonging,

and that this experience may function for the individual (and group) as a developmental step

toward the formation of a cohesive self" (Sheppard, 2008, p. 243).

They show you their growth, not just like their hair, but also as a person, as an

individual. So I think that's important, because you start out probably a little

doubtful about it, and kind of scared to take that big step, and you don't know

what the outcome will be, you don't know how you're really going to feel about

it. I mean, for a time I was kind of a little insecure about chopping all of my hair

off and being natural. So, seeing other people do it and seeing, where they've

come, and seeing where they've gotten to is very encouraging. (Moore, 2014, p. 27-28)

Antokoletz (1993) discovered in her research how cultural selfobjects "continue to serve mirroring and idealizing functions throughout a person's life by supplying culturally accepted ways of gaining recognition and approval from other group members," which serves as "cultural ideals" which an individual can embrace to experience feelings of self-worth and power (Antokoletz, 1993, p. 42).

Thus, when Black women engaged in social media communities by posting selfies, it may be feasible through the lens of self psychology to argue that the posting, liking, hashtagging of selfies creates any "interconnected experience" for each individual, providing positive mirroring, submersion into a group, and creating feelings of admiration through "selfobject perfection" (Kohut, 1985). In use of this concept and application to natural hair selfies, Rector cautions that "[w]hat is critical…is to understand the way in which these selfobject needs are met and understood, i.e., the cultural content and historical backdrop that informs what is mirrored, idealized, and the criteria for belonging" (Rector, 2013, p. 7-1- 7-4). For example, one individual Black women who posts natural hair selfies describes it as,

> [i]nstead of defining selfies by all the negative associations, I see them as radical statements of self-love. Never before have we seen so many naturals publicly displaying themselves as beautiful in multiple areas of social discourse and gatherings. Women of color have mainly been relegated to the sidelines of what society defines as beautiful. The beauty of online spaces is that you get to choose how and when to celebrate yourself without waiting for other people to notice.

Taking selfies is our way of saying, I am here, I am comfortable in my own skin,

and I love my hair! (Loraine, 2014)

Similar to Warner's studies (2013) examining the connection between creativity and narcissism,

where the artist's work is a sign of transformation, the artist's self-focus is not a form of

regression but increases feelings of freedom and connection to one's personal truth. This causes

a shift towards a more sustained self-confidence.

Social Media and Selfies as Safe Space

In effect, social media such as Instagram or Facebook pages devoted to Black women's

natural hair selfies may be considered a form of safe space. Collins discusses the importance of

"safe space" for Black women and expresses how "[t]hese spaces are not only safe—they form

prime locations for resisting objectification as the Other" (Collins, 1990, p. 101). Here, in spaces

such as natural hair forums on Instagram or Facebook, these forums allow Black women to

observe other Black women with natural hair and recognize that images of Black women

perpetuated in mainstream American culture may, for some, be at best unsuitable and at worst

destructive (Collins, 1990, p. 101). Hashtags allow women to form communal space, receive

praise and positive feedback, and possibly feel part of a world unrecognized in mainstream

America. For some Black women, being able to post positive images of themselves the way they

wish to be seen, in a manner that prizes their natural selves, may be a technologically savvy form

of engaging in daily acts of self-love and self-definition (Collins, 1998).

Thus, the creation of the space through individual posting of selfies, although an

individual action, may produce microchanges that inevitably shape images of Black women

performed in mainstream culture. This may then reflect more of how Black women desire to to

be seen (the ideal or possible self) rather than identities and standards imposed on their bodies that may be oppressive. As Audre Lorde profoundly states,

> The development of self-defined Black women, ready to explore and pursue our power and interests within our communities, is a vital component in the war for Black liberation….When Black women in this country come together to examine our sources of strength and support, and to recognize our common social, cultural, emotional, and political interests, it is a development which can only contribute to the power of the Black community as a whole. (Lorde, 1984, p. 45-46)

These safe spaces are not new; hooks, Lorde, and Collins each write about finding space within the margins. In the 1970s, the feminist slogan "the personal is political" operated as a metaphor in feminist organizing, pointing out how politics permeates everyday life and how in everyday life individual actions can challenge structural power relations (Collins, 1998). The difference in use of space or creation of safe space in social media differs in that it can expedite conversation, be accessed anywhere in the world, and allows engagement either anonymously or rooted in real connections (Manikandan, 2014). Since the 1970s, the phrase 'coming to voice' increasingly replaced the 'personal is political' in Black feminist thought. The metatphor of 'coming to voice' references the "collective quest for self-definition and self-determination" and Black women searching for a "voice" in America (Collins, 1998, p. 46). This concept might apply in examining the phenomenon of Black women's use of social media as through the process of taking the photo and cataloging the experience, a new voice emerges.

Consideration of implications for social work practice, policy or research

As every individual's sociocultural background impact her identity, it appears through self psychology and Black Feminist theory, to be critical to consider culture, and race, structural

and historical racism, when assessing whether an individual's actions indicate pathology or healthy development. It is apparent in current research exploring the use of social media and narcissism, that the findings are still murky; however, there is evidence showing broadly that use of social media can be correlated with narcissistic tendencies. Thus, when examining the phenomenon of Black women posting natural hair selfies on Instagram or Facebook, clinician's could easily be concerned that these actions may indicate potential pathology, be part of developing healthy forms of narcissism, or indicative of developing stronger self-confidence, self-definition, and self-esteem. The fact that these options could provide significantly different case formulations, treatment plans and case interventions, shows that it is crucial for clinicians to consider and explore these factors in their process and through the therapeutic alliance. In addition, as clinicians come from different backgrounds and experiences, it is phenomenon such as these that should be researched and further explored as a means to maintain cultural competence and strive for cultural humility (Comas-Diaz, 2007). Only when we see an individual surrounded by the intrapsychic, the interpersonal, the structural and historical factors contributing to who they are in front of us, can we truly begin to understand the person before us and find meaningful ways to support positive growth, transformation and empowerment.

Possible therapeutic interventions using selfies might include asking your client to create a selfie diary to track different factors including mood, moments of struggling with body image, hair development, different expressions of their identity, and so forth. Selfies could also be beneficial if the clinician works with the client to post certain selfies and track together the comments, likes, and feelings after the posting to directly examine a particular life transition or aspect of their identity that is important to them. Lastly, clinicians could use selfies in group

therapy sessions as a group project, or as individual homework that the group then shares during session.

This thesis supports and encourages clinicians to consider alternative and innovative forms of interventions and/or tools to support a patient's process of increasing self-esteem, and obtaining twinship and mirroring where there may lack opportunities in their communities. Lastly, this thesis also provides examples of ways in which use of social media forums such as Instagram may provide support for the client or provide new avenues of strengthening someone's feeling of community and/or inclusion.

Conclusion

As Black women's bodies continue to be sites of judgment, shame and Otherness, important aspects of a Black woman's identity such as her hair continues to be a sensitive issue and conveyor of complex messages. Historically, a Black woman's hair said much about herself, which continues in the present day. As technological development, and social media in particular, has allowed individuals to share their experiences and identities across the globe almost instantaneously, Americans in particular as a highly individualized society, utilize social media and post selfies at lightening speed. This change in culture has caused concern amongst researchers; however, studies seem to consistently lack appropriate cultural competency to explore alternative rationales underlying individuals desire to post selfies. For Black women in particular who lack access to space in mainstream America to be recognized for their beauty, posting of selfies may provide a safe space to find community, to explore self-identity, and/or as an act of self-definition and self-love. Due to historical and cultural factors specific to the Black community, the tension between a more collectivist tendency versus current American culture increasing individualism, creates new dynamics for individuals as they both struggle to focus on

creating self-concept while simultaneously are raised with a more collectivists and group identity perspective. These differences in individualism and it's correlation with self-esteem and narcissism require further research to better understand the cultural nuances in assessing narcissistic tendencies in individual behaviors. While it is unknown how long selfie culture and obsession with social media will last, while it is still highly utilized, clinicians might consider examining its use as well as using it as a clinical tool to better understand clients, and to provide alternative means for mirroring and support appropriate clinical diagnosis, case formulation, and treatment planning.

References

American Psychiatric Association. (2000). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (4th ed., text rev.). http://dx.doi.org/10.1176/appi.books.9780890423349

Andersen, M.L., & Hill Collins, P. (2001). *Race, class, and gender: an anthology.* Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Antokoletz, J.C. (1993). A psychoanalytic view of cross-cultural passages. *American Journal Of Psychoanalysis, 53*(1), 35-54.

Baker, H. S., & Baker, M. N. (1987). Heinz Kohut's Self Psychology: An Overview. *American Journal Of Psychiatry, 144*(1), 1-9.

Bargh, J. A., & McKenna, K.Y. (2004). The Internet and social life. *Annual Review of Psychology, 55,* 573−590.

Banks, I. (2000). *Hair Matters*. New York, NY: NYU Press.

Barker, V. (2012). A generational comparison of social networking site use: The influence of age and social identity. *International Journal of Aging and Human Development, 74*(2), 163-187.

Battle-Walters, K. (2004*). Sheila's shop: working-class African American women talk about life, love, race, and hair.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Bell-Scott, P. (1994). *Life notes: personal writings by contemporary Black women.* New York: Norton.

Bennett, J. M. (2006). *History matters: patriarchy and the challenge of feminism.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Bergman, S. M., Fearrington, M. E., Davenport, S. W., & Bergman, J. Z. (2011). Millennials, narcissism, and social networking: What narcissists do on social networking sites and why. *Personality And Individual Differences, 50,* 706-711. doi:10.1016/j.paid.2010.12.022

Berzoff, J., Flanagan, L., & Hertz, P. (2011). *Inside out and outside in: Psychodynamic clinical theory and psychopathology in contemporary multicultural contexts*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Błachnio, A., Przepiórka, A., & Rudnicka, P. (2013). Psychological Determinants of Using Facebook: A Research Review. *International Journal Of Human-Computer Interaction, 29*(11), 775-787. doi:10.1080/10447318.2013.780868

Borossa, J. (2007). Narcissistic wounds, race and racism: a comment on Frantz Fanon's critical engagement with psychoanalysis. In Gaitanidis, A., & Curk, P. (Eds.), *Narcissism: a critical reader* (pp. 113-127). London: New York.

Byrd, A. D., & Tharps, L. L. (2001). *Hair story: untangling the roots of Black hair in America.* New York: St. Martin's Press.

Campbell, W. K., Rudich, E. A., & Sedikides, C. (2002). Narcissism, Self-Esteem, and the Positivity of Self-Views: Two Portraits of Self-Love. *Personality & Social Psychology Bulletin, 28*(3), 358.

Campbell, W. K. (2001). Is narcissism really so bad? *Psychological Inquiry, 12,* 214–216.

Campbell, W. K., & Foster, C. A. (2002). Narcissism and commitment in romantic relationships: An investment model analysis. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 28,* 484–495. doi:10.1177/0146167202287006

Campbell, W. K., Foster, C. A., & Finkel, E. J. (2002). Does self-love lead to love for others? A

    story of narcissistic game playing. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 83,*

    340–354. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.83.2.340

Carpenter, C. J. (2012). Narcissism on Facebook: Self-promotional and anti-social

    behavior. *Personality And Individual Differences, 52,* 482-486.

    doi:10.1016/j.paid.2011.11.011

Chapman, Y. (2007) *"I am not my hair! Or am I?": Black women's transformative experience in*

    their self perceptions of abroad and at home (Unpublished master thesis). Georgia State

    University, Atlanta, GA.

Collins, P. H. (1998). *Fighting words: Black women and the search for justice.* United States of

    America: University of Minn. Press.

Hill Collins, P. (2000). *Black feminist thought: knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of*

    empowerment. New York: Routledge.

Cooper, B. (2014). The politics of black women's hair: Why it's seen with skepticism—and a

    need to discipline. *Salon*. Retrieved from

    http://www.salon.com/2014/04/22/the_politics_of_my_black_hair_why_its_seen_with_s

    kepticism_and_a_need_to_discipline/

Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist

    Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist

    Politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*. Retrieved from

    http://politicalscience.tamu.edu/documents/faculty/Crenshaw-Demarginalizing.pdf

Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence

      Against Women of Color. *Stanford Law Review, 43*(6), 1241-1299.

Comas-Diaz, L. (2012). *Multicultural care: A clinician's guide to cultural competence*.

      Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Davenport, S. W., Bergman, S. M., Bergman, J. Z., & Fearrington, M. E. (2014). Twitter versus

      Facebook: Exploring the role of narcissism in the motives and usage of different social

      media platforms. *Computers In Human Behavior, 32,* 212-220.

      doi:10.1016/j.chb.2013.12.011

Davis, K. (2008). Intersectionality as buzzword: A sociology of science perspective on what

      makes a feminist theory successful. *Feminist Theory, 9*(1), 67-85.

      doi:10.1177/1464700107086364

de Vries, D. A., & Peter, J. (2013). Women on display: The effect of portraying the self online

      on women's self-objectification. *Computers In Human Behavior, 29,* 1483-1489.

      doi:10.1016/j.chb.2013.01.015

Dhawan, N., Kunik, M. E., Oldham, J., & Coverdale, J. (2010). Prevalence and treatment of

      narcissistic personality disorder in the community: a systematic review. *Comprehensive*

      Psychiatry, 51, 333-339. doi:10.1016/j.comppsych.2009.09.003

Dicker, R. C. (2008). *A history of U.S. feminisms.* Berkeley, CA: Seal Press.

Donnellan, M. B., Trzesniewski, K. H., & Robins, R. W. (2009). Brief Report: An emerging

      epidemic of narcissism or much ado about nothing?. *Journal Of Research In*

      Personality, 43, 498-501. doi:10.1016/j.jrp.2008.12.010

Ellington, T. (2014). Bloggers, Vloggers, and a Virtual Sorority: A Means of Support for African

    American Women Wearing Natural Hair. *Journalism and Mass Communication, 4*(9),

    552-564.

Emmons, R.A. (1984). Factor analysis and construct validity of the Narcissistic Personality

    Inventory. *Journal of Personality Assessment, 48*, 291-300.

Facebook Press, 2015: *Facebook: Press page*. (n.d.). Retrieved from http://newsroom.fb.com/

Freud, S. (1914). *Psychopathology of everyday life.* New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing.

Freud, S. (1915). Observations on Transference Love. *Standard Edition, XII,* 159-171.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed. Translated by Myra Bergman Ramos.* New York:

    Herder and Herder.

Fonagy, P., Person, E. S., & Sandler, J. (2012). *Freud's "On Narcissism—An Introduction".*

    London: Karnac.

Forest, A. L., & Wood, J. V. (2012). When social networking is not working: Individuals with

    low self-esteem recognize but do not reap the benefits of self-disclosure on facebook.

    Psychological Science, 23(3), 295-302. doi:10.1177/0956797611429709.

Fosshage, J. L. (2009). Some key features in the evolution of self psychology and

    psychoanalysis. *Annals Of The New York Academy Of Sciences, 11*(59), 1-18.

    doi:10.1111/j.1749-6632.2008.04346.

Foster, J. D., Campbell, W. K., & Twenge, J. M. (2003). Individual differences in narcissism:

    Inflated self-views across the lifespan and around the world. *Journal Of Research In*

    Personality, 37, 469-486. doi:10.1016/S0092-6566(03)00026-6

Gabriel, F. (2014). Sexting, Selfies and Self-Harm: Young People, Social Media and the

    Performance of Self-Development. *Media International Australia, 151*, 104-112.

Garsbo, C., Sorensson, W.E., (2014). *A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words - A qualitative*

    analysis of how consumers identify themselves on Instagram (Unpublished master thesis).

    Lund University, Lund School of Economics and Management, Lund, Sweden.

Goodstein, R., & Ponterotto, J.G. (1997). Racial and ethnic identity: Their relationship and their

    contribution to self-esteem. *Journal of Black Psychology*, *23*, 275-292.

Haferkamp, N., Eimler, S. C., Papadakis, A., & Kruck, J. V. (2012). Men Are from Mars,

    Women Are from Venus? Examining Gender Differences in Self-Presentation on Social

    Networking Sites. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior & Social Networking, 15*(2), 91-98.

    doi:10.1089/cyber.2011.0151

Heeman K., D., & Papacharissi, Z. (2003). Cross-cultural differences in online self-

    presentation: A content analysis of personal Korean and US home pages. *Asian Journal*

    Of Communication, 13(1), 100-119.

hooks, b. (1989). *Talking back: thinking feminist, thinking black.* Boston, MA: South End Press.

hooks, b. (1995). *Killing rage: ending racism.* New York: H. Holt and Co.

hooks, b. (1999). *Ain't I a woman: Black women and feminism.* Boston, MA: South End Press.

Hu, Manikonda, Kambhampati (Eds.). (2014). Proceedings from the Eighth International AAAI

    Conference on Weblogs and Social Media: *What We Instagram: A First Analysis of*

    Instagram Photo Content and User Types. Ann Arbor, MI: ICWSM.

Instagram Press, 2015: *Instagram: Press page*. (n.d.). Retrieved from http://instagram.com/press/

Jackson, L.A., Erivin, K.S., & Hodge, C.N. (1992). Narcissism and body image. *Journal of*

    Research in Personality, 26, 357-370.

Jakobsen, J. R. (1998). *Working alliances and the politics of difference: diversity and feminist*

    ethics. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Johnson, E. (2013). *Resistance and empowerment in Black women's hair styling.* Burlington,

    VT: Ashgate Publishing Company.

Johnson, T. and Bankhead, T. (2014). Hair It Is: Examining the Experiences of Black Women

    with Natural Hair. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, *2,* 86-100.

    doi:10.4236/jss.2014.21010

Jordan, J. (1981). *Civil wars.* Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Kalpiduo, M., Costin, D., & Morris, J. (2011). The relationship between facebook and the

    wellbeing of undergraduate college students. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, & Social*

    Networking, 14, 183-189. doi:10.1089/cyber.2010.0061

Heeman Kim, D., & Papacharissi, Z. (2003). Cross-cultural differences in online self-

    presentation: A content analysis of personal Korean and US home pages. *Asian Journal*

    Of Communication, 13(1), 100-119.

Kohut, H. (1971). *The analysis of the self: a systematic approach to the psychoanalytic treatment*

    of narcissistic personality disorders. New York, NY: International Universities Press.

Kohut, H. (1977). *The restoration of the self.* New York: International Universities Press.

Kohut, H., Goldberg, A., & Stepansky, P. E. (1984). *How does analysis cure?* Chicago, IL:

    University of Chicago Press.

Kohut, H., & Wolf, E.S. (1978). The disorders of the self and their treatment: an outline.

    International Journal of Psychoanalysis, 59, 413-425

Koppelman, C. (1996). Politics of hair. *Frontiers: A Journal Of Womens Studies, 17*(2), 87-88.

Krämer, N. C., & Winter, S. (2008). Impression management 2.0: The relationship of self-

    esteem, extraversion, self-efficacy, and self-presentation within social networking sites.

Journal of Media Psychology: Theories, Methods, and Applications, 20(3), 106-116. doi:10.1027/1864-1105.20.3.106

Krolkke, C., & Srensen, A. S. (2006). *Gender communication theories & analyses: from silence to performance.* Thousand Oaks, Calif.; London: SAGE.

Lake, O. (2003). *Blue veins and kinky hair: naming and color consciousness in African America*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger.

Lasén, A., & Gómez-Cruz, E. (2009). Digital photography and picture sharing: Redefining the public/private divide. Knowledge, *Technology & Policy, 22,* 205-215. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s12130-009-9086-8

Lee, E. B. (2012). Young, Black, and Connected: Facebook Usage Among African American College Students. *Journal Of Black Studies, 43*(3), 336-354. doi:10.1177/0021934711425044

Lee, E. B. (2014). Facebook Use and Texting Among African American and Hispanic Teenagers: An Implication for Academic Performance. *Journal Of Black Studies, 45*(2), 83-101. doi:10.1177/0021934713519819

Lenhart, A., Purcell, K., Smith, A., Zickuhr, K. (2010). *Social Media & Mobile Internet Use among Teens and Young Adults Millennials.* Retrieved from http://www.pewinternet.org/files/old-media/Files/Reports/2010/PIP_Social_Media_and_Young_Adults_Report_Final_with_to plines.pdf

Liberman, M. D. (2013). Kohut's self psychology approach to treating pathological narcissism. In J. S. Ogrodniczuk, J. S. Ogrodniczuk (Eds.), *Understanding and treating pathological*

narcissism (pp. 253-268). Washington, DC, US: American Psychological Association.

doi:10.1037/14041-015

Lin, K., & Lu, H. (2011). Why people use social networking sites: An empirical   study

integrating network externalities and motivation theory. *Computers in Human   Behavior,*

27(3), 1152-1161. doi:10.1016/j.chb.2010.12.009

Lorraine, J. (2014, July 10). Natural Hair Selfies— Love Them or Hate Them? Retrieved from:

globalcoutureblog.net/2014/07/natural-hair-selfies-love-hate.html

Lorde, A. (1984). *Sister outsider: essays and speeches.* Trumansburg, N.Y.: Crossing Press.

Manikandan,G. (2013). Social media and mobile internet usage: Relational Study on Teens and

Young Adults, *International Journal of Logistics and Supply Chain Management*

Perspectives, 2(4), 607-615.

Manuel, J. B. (2011). Finding a Compass in an Urban Storm: Toward the Use of a Self

Psychological Perspective in Facilitating an African American Adolescent Self-

Expression Group. *International Journal Of Psychoanalytic Self Psychology, 6*(1), 26-45.

doi:10.1080/15551024.2011.529867

Masur, P. K., Reinecke, L., Ziegele, M., & Quiring, O. (2014). The interplay of intrinsic need

satisfaction and Facebook specific motives in explaining addictive behavior on

Facebook. *Computers In Human Behavior, 39,* 376-386. doi:10.1016/j.chb.2014.05.047

McLean, J. (2007). Psychotherapy with a Narcissistic Patient Using Kohut's Self Psychology

Model. *Psychiatry (Edgmont (Pa.: Township)), 4*(10), 40-47.

McMillen, S. (2008). *Seneca Falls and the origins of the women's rights movement.* New York:

Oxford University Press.

Mehdizadeh, S. (2010). Self-Presentation 2.0: Narcissism and Self-Esteem on

Facebook. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior & Social Networking, 13*(4), 357-364.

doi:10.1089/cyber.2009.0257

Mitchell, S. A. & Black, M. J. (1995). *Freud and beyond: A history of modern psychoanalytic*

thought. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Moore, S. (2014). *Black Women's Natural Hair Care Communities: Social, Political, and*

Cultural Implications (Unpublished master thesis). Smith College School for Social

Work, Northampton, MA.

Muller, L., & Jordan, J. (1995). *June Jordan's Poetry for the People: a revolutionary.* New York,

NY: Routledge.

Nadkarni, A., & Hofmann, S. G. (2012). Review: Why do people use Facebook?. *Personality*

And Individual Differences, 52, 243-249. doi:10.1016/j.paid.2011.11.007

The Nielsen Company. (2013). Resilient, Receptive and Relevant. The African-Ameircan

Consumer 2013 Report. Retrieved from http://nnpa.org/wp-

content/uploads/2013/06/African-American-Consumer-Report-2013.pdf

The Nielsen Company. (2014a, August 11). Listen up: African American consumers and music.

Retrieved from http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/reports/2014/listen-up-african-

american-consumers-and-music.html

O'Neal, L. (2015, March 19). I had a thot but didn't know it was a thing. *The Washington Post.*

Retrieved from http://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/lonnae-oneal-i-had-a-thot-

but-didnt-know-it-was-a-thing/2015/03/18/106771ec-cd03-11e4-8c54-

ffb5ba6f2f69_story.html

Paul, E., & Brier, S. (2001). Friendsickness in the transition to college: Precollege predictors and

    college adjustment correlates. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, *79*(1), 77–

    89.

Pempek, T. A., Yermolayeva, Y. A., & Calvert, S. L. (2009). College students' social networking

    experiences on Facebook. *Journal Of Applied Developmental Psychology*, *30*, 227-238.

    doi:10.1016/j.appdev.2008.12.010

Peters, M. (2010). Culture as SelfObject: Its Impact on the Self, *Psychoanalytic Inquiry, 30,* 357-

    367.

Plaut, V.C., Markus, H. R., & Lachman, M. E. (2002). Place matters: Consensual features and

    regional variations in America well-being and self. *Journal of Personality and Social*

    Psychology, 83, 160–184.

Raskin, R., Novacek, J., & Hogan, R. (1991). Narcissism, self-esteem, and defensive self-

    enhancement. *Journal of Personality, 59,* 20–38.

Rector, L.J. (2013). Review of Self, Culture and Others in Womanist Practical Theology, *The*

    Journal of Pastoral Theology, 23(2) p. 7-1-7-4.

Rhodewalt, F., & Morf, C. C. (1995). Self and interpersonal correlates of the Narcissistic

    Personality Inventory: A review and new findings. *Journal of Research in Personality,*

    29, 1–23.

Robinson, C. L. (2011). Hair as Race: Why "Good Hair" May Be Bad for Black

    Females. *Howard Journal Of Communications, 22*(4), 358-376.

    doi:10.1080/10646175.2011.617212

Ronningstam, E. (2000). *Disorders of narcissism: diagnostic, clinical, and empirical*

    implications. Northvale, NJ: J. Aronson.

Sedikides, C., Rudich, E. A., Gregg, A. P., Kumashiro, M., & Rusbult, C. (2004). Are Normal Narcissists Psychologically Healthy?: Self-Esteem Matters. *Journal Of Personality And Social Psychology, 87*(3), 400-416. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.87.3.400

Stefanone, M. A., Lackaff, D., & Rosen, D. (2011). Contingencies of self-worth and social-networking-site behavior. *CyberPsychology, Behavior & Social Networking, 14*(1), 41-49. doi:10.1089/cyber.2010.0049

Steinfield, C., Ellison, N. B., & Lampe, C. (2008). Social capital, self-esteem, and use of online social network sites: A longitudinal analysis. *Journal Of Applied Developmental Psychology, 29*, 434-445. doi:10.1016/j.appdev.2008.07.002

Shaw, B., & Gant, L. (2002). In defense of the Internet: The relationship between Internet communication and depression, loneliness, self-esteem, and perceived social support. *CyberPsychology & Behavior, 5,* 157-171.

Sheppard, P.I. (2008). Mourning the Loss of Cultural Selfobjects: Black Embodiment and Religious Experience after Trauma. *Practical Theology, 1*(2), 233-257.

St. Clair, M. (2004). *Object relations and self psychology: an introduction.* Australia; Belmont, CA: Thomson/Brooks/Cole.

Stefanone, M. A., Lackaff, D., & Rosen, D. (2011). Contingencies of self-worth and social-networking-site behavior. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking, 14*, 41–49.

Tazghini, S., & Siedlecki, K. L. (2013). A mixed method approach to examining facebook use and its relationship to self-esteem. *Computers in Human Behavior, 29*(3), 827-832. doi:10.1016/j.chb.2012.11.010

Thomas, A., & Sillen, S. (1972). *Racism and psychiatry.* New York, NY: Brunner/Mazel.

Thompson, C. (2009). Black Women and Identity: What's Hair Got to do with It?. *Michigan Feminist Studies, (22)*, 78-90.Thompson, J. B. (1995). *The media and modernity: a social theory of the media / John B. Thompson.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995.

Togashi, K., & Kottler, A. (2012) The many faces of twinship: From the psychology of the self to the psychology of being human. *International Journal Of Psychoanalytic Self Psychology,7*(3), 331-351. doi:10.1080/15551024.2012.686158

Traynor, T. (2013). *Reading, Recognition, and Loving Blackness: How African American Adolescents' Reflections on Black Literature Inform Scholarship Related to the Visibility of Marginalized Identities*. Retreived from ProQuest, UMI Dissertations. (1327363614)

Twenge, J. M., & Campbell, W. K. (2009). *The narcissism epidemic: living in the age of entitlement.* New York: Free Press.

Twenge, J. M., & Foster, J. D. (2008). Mapping the scale of the narcissism epidemic: Increases in narcissism 2002–2007 within ethnic groups. *Journal Of Research In Personality, 42*(6), 1619-1622. doi:10.1016/j.jrp.2008.06.014

Twenge, J.M. & Foster, J.D. (2010). Birth Cohort Increases in Narcissistic Personality Traits Among American College Students, 1982-2009. *Journal of Social Psychological and Personality Science, 1*(1), 99-106.

Twenge, J. M., Miller, J. D., & Campbell, W. K. (2014). The narcissism epidemic: Commentary on Modernity and narcissistic personality disorder. *Personality Disorders: Theory, Research, And Treatment, 5*(2), 227-229. doi:10.1037/per0000008

Walker, A. (1983). *In search of our mothers' gardens: womanist prose / by Alice Walker.* San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Wallace, M. (1992). Anger in Isolation: A Black Feminist's Search for Sisterhood. In Dandridge, R.B. Editor (Ed.), *Black women's blues: a literary anthology, 1934-1988.* New York: G.K. Hall; Toronto: Maxwell Macmillan Canada; New York: Maxwell Macmillan International.

Walters, M. (2005). *Feminism: A very short introduction.* New York, New York: Oxford University Press.

Warner, A. (2013). Creativity and the Self: A Self Psychological Approach to Art and Healing. *Clinical Social Work Journal, 41*(1), 68-76. doi:10.1007/s10615-012-0390-5

Watson, P. J., & Biderman, M. D. (1993). Narcissistic Personality Inventory factors, splitting, and self-consciousness. *Journal of Personality Assessment, 61*, 41–57.

Watson, P.J., Hickman, S.E., Morris, R.J. (1996). Self-reported narcissism and shame: Testing the defensive self-esteem and continuum hypotheses. *Journal of Personality and Individual Differences, 21*(2), 253-259. doi:10.1016/0191-8869(96)00063-3

Weitz, R. (2004). *Rapunzel's daughters: What women's hair tells us about women's lives.* New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Wendt, B. (2014). *The Allure of the Selfie: Instagram and the New Self-Portrait.* Amsterdam. Institute of Network Cultures.

Whitsett, D. P., & Whitsett, D. A. (1996). Anti-Black Racism and Its Consequences: A Self Psychology/Object Relations Perspective. *Journal Of Analytic Social Work, 3*(4), 61-81.

Wissink, S., Marsh, J., Regan, N.M., Munster, G., Murphy, E., Naughton, S., Olson, M., Tamminga, N. (Fall 2014). *Piper Jaffray 28th Semi-Annual Taking Stock With Teens Survey*. Retrieved from http://www.piperjaffray.com/3col.aspx?id=3268

Wolf, E. S. (1988). *Treating the self: elements of clinical self psychology.* New York: Guilford Press.

Wrammert, A. (2014). *Selfies, dolls and film stars.* (Unpublished master thesis). Uppsala University, Uppsala, Sweden.

Zhao, S., Grasmuck, S., & Martin, J. (2008). Identity construction on Facebook: Digital empowerment in anchored relationships.*Computers In Human Behavior, 24*, 1816-1836. doi:10.1016/j.chb.2008.02.012