

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: #TEAMLIGHTSKIN #TEAMDARKSKIN
#TEAMNATURAL #TEAMRELAXED:
BLACK WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF SKIN
HUE AND HAIR POLITICS IN COLLEGE

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Over the past two decades the presence and visibility of Black women's natural hair has increased, along with Black women's conscious decision to vocalize social experiences related to hair texture, styling, and the way those aesthetics and associated politics are inextricably linked to skin hue. The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to explore with a group of Black, undergraduate women their perceptions of the ways hair and skin hue politics manifest within the campus culture of a predominantly White institution (PWI) of higher education and how such politics work to influence the women's overall college experiences. The primary finding of this study is that, while skin hue and hair politics are not perceived to significantly influence participants' academic success, they do impact social, emotional, and psychological wellbeing. Additional findings highlight the power of mainstream and social media as contributing factors to hair and skin hue politics, as well as the resulting burdensome onus placed upon Black women to educate others

regarding their physical attributes and personal appearance. A more deeply informed perspective on these students' lived experiences as Black women in college is vital to those who care about Black women's successful journeys through higher education in the U.S. A critical understanding of the women's stories could inform development of improved programming and practice for student affairs professionals, faculty, staff, school counselors, campus leaders, and the women students themselves, with the aim of enriched and more meaningful educational experiences. This study might also be of benefit to Black women as they transition from high school to and through college and find themselves in safe, brave spaces for honest, critical discussions and opportunities to learn together how to actively negotiate and improve campus communities.

Keywords: skin hue, natural hair, body politics, Black women, predominantly White institutions, college experience