

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: **WHAT I LIKE: CHRONICLES OF BLACK MALES' PERSPECTIVES OF BLACK WOMEN'S HAIR**

Tunisia N. Lumpkin, Doctor of Philosophy, 2022

Directed By: Dr. Kimberly R. Moffitt, Dean
College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences
Professor, Language, Literacy & Culture

Dr. Beverly Bickel, Clinical Associate Professor
Language, Literacy, and Culture

A lot of the research on Black hair is focused on Black women and their experiences whether it be in public spaces, work, or in their relationships with Black men. Some research highlights the influence Black men have on hair selections of Black women, including women addressing comments made by their male partners. But there is limited research on what Black men are actually saying and feeling about Black women's hair. The objective of this research is to explore if any socially constructed identities of people influence Black males' perceptions of Black women's hair. Utilizing the concepts of socially constructed identity and intersectionality, the following research question is used for this study: What effect does socially constructed identities have on Black males' perceptions of Black women's hair? This study takes a contemporary approach by asking questions based on the men's own lived experiences to analyze how their lived experiences might influence how they perceive Black women's hair.

In order to understand Black men's lived experiences and the identities they claim and are assigned, the study is framed by how heterosexual identities develop in the context of White supremacy, White gaze, and male gaze, which have positions of power and dominance. Rabelo et al. (2020) defined the White gaze as "seeing people's bodies through the lens of whiteness" and this gaze "distorts perceptions of people who deviate from whiteness, subjecting them to bodily scrutiny and control" (p. 1840). Furthermore, Glapka (2018) explained the male gaze's role in the "construction of female beauty" and how it impacts "the relationship between the beauty and male heterosexual looking – sex appeal" (p. 88). This idea of what is considered beauty in terms of Black women's hair from Black heterosexual men is examined in this study. A qualitative approach was used, consisting of two pilot in-depth interviews, one pilot focus group, six in-depth interviews, and three focus groups, which were conducted via Zoom. There were 31 Black men-identifying participants.

This study offers an opportunity for Black men to share their experiences and ideas to scholarly conversations that have been largely missing their perspectives. In previous studies, Black men are "discussed" by Black women, but Black men's direct responses are not available. By receiving responses directly from Black men, this study contributes to an understanding of how and why the men feel the ways they do by exposing some new truths in the way socially constructed identities impact people, specifically Black men. I hope that this work creates a moment of reflection, which in turn may create change, even small individual changes, in how we interact and see each other in the Black community.

Keywords: Black hair, Black identity, Black men, European beauty standards, White gaze, male gaze