

She Wears It How? Perceived Racism and Colorism Relate to Hair Texture Dissatisfaction in Black Women

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ABSTRACT. Black women in America are affected by racism and colorism—social influences which can impact their unique body-image features such as hair texture dissatisfaction and their use of hazardous chemical hair relaxants. A Qualtrics survey of Black women who had used hair relaxants ($N = 316$), conducted via Prolific, explored the relationship between perceived racism and colorism and hair texture dissatisfaction, assessed using the Hair Texture Dissatisfaction Scale (HTDSS) and a newly developed Hair Texture Ideal and Discrepancy (HTD) scale. Racism was associated with both measures of hair dissatisfaction (HTD: $r = .12, p = .03$; HTDSS: $r = .13, p = .04$), but not hair relaxant use ($r = .03$). Similarly, colorism was also associated with both measures of hair dissatisfaction (HTD: $r = .14, p = .02$; HTDSS: $r = .19, p = .01$), but not hair relaxant use ($r = .09$). A straighter ideal hair texture was most related to hair dissatisfaction (HTDSS: $r = -.49$) and frequency of hazardous hair relaxant use ($r = -.19, p < .001$). Social identity theory (SIT) helps to explain how the prejudicial social forces of racism and colorism can be internalized for Black women and expressed in body image dissatisfaction vis-à-vis White beauty ideals. These findings suggest that hair texture dissatisfaction warrants further research as hair texture dissatisfaction relates to Black women's body image.

Keywords: hair texture discrepancy, dissatisfaction, relaxants, racism, colorism, women



Diversity badge earned for conducting research focusing on aspects of diversity.

Across many parts of the world, beauty ideals are deeply racialized, often prioritizing traits typically associated with White individuals—such as lighter skin and straighter hair—as the standards of beauty for women of color (Harper & Choma, 2019). These White beauty standards have been extensively analyzed within the frameworks of racism and colonialism within the United States (Harper & Choma, 2019; Mathews & Johnson, 2015; Patton, 2006; Price, 2020). Social identity theory (SIT) explains how individuals' self-identification as members of social groups shapes their intergroup behaviors and influences intragroup processes (Hughes et al., 2015; Tajfel & Turner, 2004). This theory posits that comparisons with other groups are used to maintain or enhance positive

social identities. Such comparisons can have positive effects when, for instance, women of color align with African American beauty standards that emphasize individuality (Webb et al., 2013). The Black Pride movement, which emerged during the Civil Rights era, played a pivotal role in challenging Eurocentric beauty norms and promoting natural hairstyles as symbols of resistance, empowerment, and cultural identity (Byrd & Tharps, 2014). However, when these comparisons yield negative outcomes (e.g., Black women who feel they are not meeting White beauty standards), individuals may experience a diminished social identity. To restore a more positive social identity, individuals often employ various processes and strategies (Scheifele et al., 2020). As such, women of color may use hair care practices to

align with or resist prevailing beauty standards, thereby impacting their social identity and sense of belonging.

Hair presentation has remained an important feature of Black culture dating back to American slavery (Patton, 2006). Hair holds both spiritual and social significance and was a key part of self-identity for enslaved African Americans (Patton, 2006). In the 15th century, hair was even utilized as a form of communication, with pathways being braided onto the scalp (Johnson & Bankhead, 2014; Patton, 2006). This was especially common among the Wolof, Mende, Mandingo, and Yoruba tribes (Johnson & Bankhead, 2014). After European colonists learned the communicative purpose of hair within certain African communities, colonists began having Africans' heads shaved upon enslavement, stripping them of their humanity (Patton, 2006). As slaves were not allowed cosmetic products, they used household items like bacon grease and butter to retain moisture in their hair (Patton, 2006).

In contemporary American beauty standards, the notion of “good hair” persists, characterized by straightness, softness, ease of manageability, and the ability to grow long with minimal styling or treatment—attributes that align more closely to White hair compared to Black hair, which tends to be tightly coiled (Johnson et al., 2017; Robinson, 2011). This social pressure to obtain “good hair,” as perpetuated through mainstream media, is closely related to internalized racist and colorist ideals that may lead to problematic beauty practices among Black women (Johnson et al., 2017; Price, 2020). Engagement in potentially harmful beauty practices (e.g., hair relaxing) and high levels of hair dissatisfaction (i.e., unhappiness with hair presentation) are common experiences among Black women (Harper & Choma, 2019). Through sociocultural mechanisms such as the media, racist and colorist social constructs shape the beauty standards that women are expected to meet (El Jurdi & Smith, 2018). We posited that, to the extent to which Black women associate the White beauty ideal with a positive social identity, hair dissatisfaction and engagement in beauty practices that seek to better conform to White standards (e.g., relaxing) would be more likely to occur.

Consequently, modern hairstyling methods in the Black community include chemical relaxers, hot combing, ironing, and sew-ins, which alter the natural orientation of the hair (Rucker Wright et al., 2011). Chemical relaxers may be introduced into hair routines, even as early as age six (Bellinger, 2007). Use of chemical relaxants can be especially hazardous. These products are applied to the hair to permanently alter the hair pattern and can cause negative health effects such as dermatitis, chemical burns, hair breakage, and hair loss (Donahoo & Smith, 2022). More critically, they have even been

linked to increased rates of breast and uterine cancer (Drugwatch, 2024; Stiel et al., 2016). According to the National Institute of Health (NIH) Sister Study, which includes 33,497 women aged 35–74, those who used hair straightening products—predominantly women of color—had more than twice the risk of developing ovarian cancer over an 11-year-follow up period compared to those who did not (Chang et al., 2022). As a result, a 2024 proposal aims to have the U.S. Federal Drug Administration (FDA) ban formaldehyde, a known carcinogen, from hair straightening products—a measure that the National Institute of Environmental Health Science (NIEHS) asserts is long overdue (Drugwatch, 2024). Further, African Americans spend \$225 million annually on hair products and services, with Black women spending three times more than their White counterparts (Patton, 2006). This increased spending may stem from social pressure to conform to White beauty ideals. Examining the social and cultural forces, such as racism and colorism, that potentially fuel hair texture dissatisfaction and the potentially life-threatening use of chemical relaxers among Black women is of paramount importance. Because of this, we deliberately recruited women who reported using the products within the past year as an initial study to better understand chemical relaxing behavior.

Perceived Racism and Hair

People of color have been victims of racism for centuries in America since the enslavement era in the 17th through 19th centuries. Racism can be defined as the application of prejudice by the use of power directed toward members of certain ethnic and racial groups (Jones & Carter, 1996; Pieterse et al., 2012). *Perceived racism* can (co)occur at many magnitudes, particularly at the institutional, cultural, and interpersonal levels (Pieterse et al., 2012). People of color may report exposure to racism and the extent to which they perceive the situation to be stressful, but it is sometimes difficult to ascertain apparent racism due to microaggressive and covert behaviors (Carter, 2007; Pieterse et al., 2012).

Hair is among the traits that may quickly identify an individual as being a member of a racial category, subjecting them to the associated stereotypes and biases of that category—a phenomenon that can be described as *racial phenotypicality bias* (Maddox, 2004). For Black girls and women, those whose hair texture is most closely associated with “Blackness” are more likely to be subjected to the (often negative) corresponding stereotypes and evaluations surrounding their race (Maddox, 2004). This treatment, whether positive or negative, can influence their self-esteem and racial identity formation, but also their perceptions of how

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they are viewed by others (Johnson & Bankhead, 2014; Price, 2020). Racial identity and perceived racism have the potential to impact the choices Black women make regarding their hair presentation and the products that they use (Lukate & Foster, 2023; Price, 2020). The persistent workplace discrimination faced by Black women due to their hair texture underscores this dynamic. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP; 2020) has even released a document entitled *Hair Discrimination is Race Discrimination* that highlights how hair is frequently used as a marker of race exposing individuals to bias and exclusion.

Perceived Colorism and Hair

Colorism is defined as prejudicial treatment and discrimination of same-race people based on differences in physical features, such as skin complexion, facial features, and hair texture, within a society that upholds Eurocentric culture (Griffin, 2021). In this socio-cultural context, darker-skinned individuals are often unfairly stereotyped as “dirty,” “lazy,” or even “ignorant” (Hunter, 2007; Sims, 2009; Sims & Hirudayaraj, 2016). Rooted in European colonialism, colorism has been documented since the 19th century, beginning with the enslavement of African American and Latin populations (Patton, 2006). White slave owners afforded greater privileges to lighter-skinned slaves by assigning them to roles within the home, while darker-skinned slaves, often relegated to fieldwork, were subjected to harsher treatment (Patton, 2006). Colorism in turn, has been internalized by many people of color today, fostering a preference for lighter skin and straighter hair, both in their own self-perception and in their perceptions of other Black individuals.

Existing research on body image has primarily focused on the impact of colorism related to skin tone satisfaction, while dissatisfaction with hair texture among Black women remains relatively underexplored. Having a darker skin tone has been linked to lower self-esteem among Black women, a relationship that is not observed among Black men (Thompson & Kieth, 2001). Further, young Black women tend to hold less favorable attitudes toward darker skin among other Black women (Mathews & Johnson, 2015). Although colorism may impact all individuals of color, its prejudice is regarded as a gendered phenomenon in that colorism is especially damaging for women of color compared to men of color (Sims & Hirudayaraj, 2016; Thompson & Kieth, 2001).

Texturism refers to the prejudice that privileges loose, straight hair textures over coiled or tightly textured hair (Griffin, 2021). Existing literature suggests an explicit preference for smooth hair over naturally textured hair (Johnson et al., 2017; Rudman & McLean, 2016; Woolford et al., 2016). This bias manifests not

only within the broader context of racism—where Black women face discrimination based on their hair texture—but also within their own communities, as it intersects with colorism. As such, hair dissatisfaction among Black women may prompt them to engage in potentially harmful beauty practices, such as using chemical relaxants to permanently straighten their hair.

Although there is limited research specifically addressing texturism and its impact on Black women’s body image, it is often directly associated with colorism, which has been more extensively studied (Hunter, 2007; Sims, 2009; Sims & Hirudayaraj, 2016). In this study, we conceptualize hair texture as an integral aspect of colorism, drawing on social identity theory to explore how these intersecting biases influence hair presentation among Black women.

The Present Study

Lowy and colleagues (2021, p. 323) have made a call to encourage scientists to apply “culturally sensitive and intersectionality-informed theory” to improve body image research that is more inclusive and addresses the unique needs of individuals of color. Further, Watson et al. (2019) emphasized the importance of contextualizing the unique body image concerns of women of color within the intersections of gender and racial oppression. These distinctive issues for women of color may include aspects of skin tone (Harper & Choma, 2019; Selani et al., 2023) and hair texture (Harper & Choma, 2019) that may impact their body image and how they are perceived and treated in modern society. Due to the life-threatening health hazards of using hair relaxants (Chang et al., 2022; Donahoo & Smith, 2022; Drugwatch, 2024; Stiel et al., 2016), we deliberately recruited women who used them to determine if their hair dissatisfaction was associated with the sociocultural forces of racism and colorism. The present study focused specifically on hair texture dissatisfaction, hair texture discrepancy, and use of toxic hair relaxants among Black women in relation to racism and colorism, which are factors known to negatively impact body image among this population (Awad et al., 2015; Harper & Choma, 2019; Paradies et al., 2015; Pieterse et al., 2012). By exploring these issues through the lens of social identity theory, this research seeks to understand how racial prejudice and colorism influence hair dissatisfaction and consequent use of harmful chemical hair relaxants. Drawing from existing social psychology and body image research, we based our investigations on the following five main exploratory research questions:

1. Are there significant correlations between hair texture dissatisfaction and racism and colorism? We hypothesized that hair texture dissatisfaction

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would be significantly and positively associated with perceived racism and colorism.

2. Are there significant correlations between hair texture discrepancy and racism and colorism? We hypothesized that hair texture discrepancy would be significantly and positively associated with perceived racism and colorism.
3. Are there significant correlations between chemical relaxing frequency and racism and colorism? We hypothesized that chemical relaxing frequency would be positively associated with perceived racism and colorism.
4. Is there a correlation between hair texture discrepancy and frequency of chemical relaxant usage? We hypothesized that greater hair texture discrepancy would be positively associated with greater chemical relaxant use.
5. Is there a correlation between ideal hair texture and chemical relaxing frequency? We hypothesized that a straighter ideal hair texture would be significantly associated with greater chemical relaxing frequency.

Method

Participants

An internal grant awarded to the researchers by their university was used to provide compensation to the participants for this study. A total of 400 participants who identified as Black women that used hair relaxants were recruited from the Prolific platform and received monetary compensation (\$1.06 each) directly through the website after completing the survey. However, 39 participants were removed from the study due to incomplete data (i.e., not responding to all survey items), 42 were removed for failing the attention check, two were removed for being White or Hispanic, and one other participant was removed for identifying as a male. Participants had an average age of 32.6 ($SD = 11.2$; range: 18–72). Of the final study sample of 316 participants, 91.8% identified as Black/African American, and 8.2% identified as Multiracial/Biracial. For the reported levels of education, 35.4% graduated high school, 24.4% had an associate's degree, 31.0% had a bachelor's degree, 6.9% had a master's degree, and 2% had either a specialist's degree or a doctoral degree. Most of the sample identified as straight/heterosexual (70.5%). The rest of the sample identified as bisexual (20.3%), gay/lesbian (4.4%), pansexual (2.0%), queer (1.2%), or other (1.2%). In terms of gender identity, 1.3% of participants identified as transgender. Institutional Review Board (IRB) exemption status was granted on September 22, 2022. This research adhered to all aspects of the American Psychological Association's ethical guidelines.

Measures

Demographics

A demographics questionnaire was administered that included questions about age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, and the highest level of education. If prospective participants did not identify as a Black woman (i.e., endorsed male, trans-male, non-binary), were not between 18 and 99 years of age, and did not endorse relaxing their hair at least once in the past year, the survey ended, and they were excluded from participating in the study.

Perceived Racism

Perceived racism was measured using a 9-item subscale that assessed the reports of ever day discrimination from the Detroit Area Study Discrimination Questionnaire (DAS-DQ; Williams et al., 1997). The items are rated on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (*almost every day*) to 6 (*never*). The scale was flipped from 1 (*never*) to 6 (*almost every day*) so that a higher score on the measure would be indicative of greater levels of perceived racism. Items were totaled, with the highest perceived racism score being 54. In the current study, Cronbach's alpha was high ($\alpha = .92$).

Perceived Colorism

Perceived colorism was measured using the In-Group Colorism Scale (ICS; Harvey et al., 2017). The scale is comprised of 20 items rated on a 7-point Likert scale and includes five subscales: Self-Concept (SC), Impression Formation (IF), Affiliation (AF), Attraction (AT), and Upward Mobility (UM). The response options range from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The revision made to the original ICS items include changing "skin tone" to "hair texture." This revision was made to better account for bias related to hair texture rather than skin tone. The subscales of ICS demonstrated coefficient alphas of .87 (SC), .73 (IF), .90 (UM), .81 (AT), and .80 (AF) in the scale development and validation study featuring a sample of Black Americans (Harvey et al., 2017). The mean of all items was calculated to create an overall score ranging from 1 to 7, with higher scores indicating greater internalization of in-group colorism (α in the present study = .86).

Hair Texture Discrepancy (HTD) Scale

The HTD scale (Appendix A) was developed to assess participants' desire for an altered hair texture by capturing the discrepancy between their natural and ideal hair textures using a visual measure of various hair types. The visual images used in this measure were adopted from Loussouarn et al. (2007). Each of the eight hair patterns were scored from 1 to 8, with "1" representing the straightest hair pattern and "8" representing the

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curliest hair pattern. We used two items: natural hair texture and ideal hair texture. The natural hair texture item asked the respondent to identify which hair pattern most accurately represented her natural hair texture. The ideal hair texture item asked which hair pattern the woman desired. Subtracting the natural hair texture from the ideal hair texture yielded the HTD rating. A score of zero was indicative that one's natural and ideal hair textures matched (perfectly happy with their hair). To avoid negative values in the statistical analysis, a constant of eight was added to all scores, converting any negative values into positive ones. Higher positive scores reflected a greater desire for straighter hair, and thus more hair texture dissatisfaction. This approach aligns with common practices in body image research, where the comparison between self and ideal is used as a metric of dissatisfaction (Anton et al., 2000; Fitzgibbon et al., 2012; Williamson et al., 1993). The mean difference for our participants was 1.42 ($SD = 1.99$), suggesting that, on average, participants desired their hair to be approximately one and a half units straighter on the HTD scale. Additionally, participants were asked if the scale was representative of their hair type. Possible responses were "Yes" or "No."

Ideal Hair Texture

Ideal hair texture (Appendix A) was determined by asking participants on the HTD, "Which is the hair texture you would most like to possess?"

Frequency of Relaxing History Scale (FRHS)

A novel self-report frequency measure (Appendix B) was used to assess the prevalence of chemical hair-relaxing behavior. The items were rated on a 6-point scale ranging from 0 (*never*) to 6 (*almost every day*). Higher scores indicate a higher frequency of chemical hair-relaxing behavior in participants. The average score was 3.36 ($SD = 1.07$), indicating that, on average, participants reported engaging in this behavior with a frequency between "a few times per year" and "a few times per month."

Hair Texture Dissatisfaction Scale (HTDSS)

A modified version of the 7-item Skin Color Satisfaction Scale (Appendix C; SCSS: Falconer & Neville, 2000) was used to measure hair texture dissatisfaction. Participants rated their agreement on a scale ranging from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 9 (*strongly disagree*). For this study, revisions made to the pre-existing SCSS included changing "skin color" to "hair texture" for all items. Hair texture dissatisfaction scores were calculated by reverse coding items (e) and (f). A score was created by averaging the items, with higher scores indicating greater dissatisfaction with one's hair texture. The original SCSS measure demonstrated an acceptable internal consistency score ($\alpha = .71$) for a sample of African American undergraduate women (Falconer & Neville, 2000). For this study, all items were included in data analysis and Cronbach's alpha was measured ($\alpha = .55$).

Attention Checks

To enhance data reliability and mitigate the influence of bots and bot-like participants, one attention check was implemented to ensure participants were focused and attentive to the survey. This item, previously used by Abbey and Meloy (2017), clearly instructed participants on which answer to select (e.g., "Select answer three for this item"). Therefore, 42 participants who failed this attention check or gave incomplete data were removed from the data set and did not receive financial compensation.

Procedure

Participants were recruited through Prolific, a research platform used for online human-subject recruitment. Each participant was redirected to a Qualtrics survey via an embedded link. Participants were informed that the survey was focused on Black women's experiences related to hair texture. The beginning of the survey included a consent form describing the purpose of the study, their rights as participants, and the researchers' contact information. Participants confirmed their answers to the inclusion criteria, completed the various measures, reported demographic information, and completed an attention check. Upon completion of the survey, participants received monetary compensation of \$1.06 directly through Prolific. The average time to complete the survey was eight minutes. All procedures were approved by the IRB of the authors' institution.

Results

Descriptive analysis was performed to assess the face validity of the HTD scale. A substantial 89.2% majority of participants affirmed that the scale accurately represented their hair type. Conversely, 10.8% of participants

TABLE 1

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Study Variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Racism (DAS-DQ)	20.70	8.71	-					
2. Colorism (ICS)	46.10	11.90	.27***	-				
3. Hair Texture Discrepancy (HTD)	1.42	1.99	.12*	.14*	-			
4. Frequency of Relaxing (FRHS)	3.36	1.07	.03	.09	-.01	-		
5. Hair Texture Dissatisfaction Scale (HTDSS)	4.15	1.06	.13*	.19***	.31***	.18**	-	
6. Ideal Hair Texture	3.60	1.67	.02	-.12	-.20***	-.19***	-.49***	-

Note. $N = 316$; $df = 315$
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$

indicated that the scale did not accurately reflect their hair texture. This discrepancy is further explored in the limitations section.

Bivariate Pearson's correlations were run for all variables and are presented in Table 1. The analysis indicated that perceived racism was significantly related to perceived colorism ($r = .27, p < .001$). Racism was associated with both measures of hair dissatisfaction (HTD: $r = .12, p = .03$; HTDSS: $r = .13, p = .04$), but not hair relaxant use ($r = .03$). Similarly, colorism was also associated with both measures of hair dissatisfaction (HTD: $r = .14, p = .02$; HTDSS: $r = .19, p = .01$), but not hair relaxant use ($r = .09$). Frequency of hazardous hair relaxant use was correlated with having a straighter ideal hair texture ($r = -.19, p < .001$) and having more hair texture dissatisfaction (HTDSS; $r = .18, p = .002$). Desiring a straighter ideal hair texture was associated with more hair dissatisfaction using both measures (HTD: $r = -.20, p < .001$; HTDSS: $r = -.49, p < .001$).

Because colorism (ICS) was associated with all of the variables of interest, we conducted further analyses on its subscales (see Table 2). Although no significant relationships were identified between the Self Concept and Affiliation subscales and hair texture dissatisfaction, a relationship was found between the Attraction subscale and more hair texture dissatisfaction ($r = .25, p < .001$), as well as a desire for a straighter ideal hair texture ($r = .23, p < .001$). Correlations were observed between the Upward Mobility subscale and hair texture dissatisfaction ($r = .20, p < .001$), as well as between the Impression Formation subscale and hair texture dissatisfaction ($r = .16, p < .05$).

Discussion

Despite the pervasive influence of racialized beauty standards, there is a notable scarcity of research examining the unique body image concerns relevant to Black women. Research that has investigated the experiences of Black women has not directly examined the role of hair texture dissatisfaction regarding beauty practices and the relationship between racism and colorism (Griffin, 2021; Harper & Choma, 2019). The present research, grounded in social identity theory, evaluated the role of perceived racism and colorism in Black women's perceptions of their hair texture, what they considered to be ideal hair, and how this relates to chemical hair relaxant use. Results showed that perceived racism and colorism were modestly related to hair texture dissatisfaction and hair texture discrepancy in our sample. These findings are consistent with previous research showing that exposure to racist and colorist comments alters Black women's interpretations of "good hair" (Dove, 2021) and align with SIT as individual's self-concept is closely tied to their group memberships (Hughes et al.,

2015; Tajfel & Turner, 2004).

Because the colorism scale (ICS) was modestly related to both metrics of hair dissatisfaction and contained individual subscales, we explored those individual constructs and found associations between the Attraction, Upward Mobility, and Impression Formation subscales with hair texture dissatisfaction. Specifically, the Attraction subscale, which examines the perceived attractiveness of various hair textures within one's group, was associated with greater hair texture dissatisfaction and a preference of straighter ideal hair textures. An example item was, "I prefer straight hair over curly hair when choosing romantic interests" and this aligns with previous research suggesting that Black women may prefer similar traits in partners (Mathews & Johnson, 2015). The Upward Mobility subscale, or perceptions that hair texture affects social and economic mobility (e.g., "Hair texture plays a big part in determining how far you can make it"), correlated with hair texture dissatisfaction, consistent with industrial organization literature highlighting ramifications of natural hair in the workplace (Koval & Rosette, 2021; Summers et al., 2022). The Impression Formation subscale, assessing how hair texture influences others' impressions suggests that negative perceptions of hair may contribute to greater dissatisfaction. Social identity theory, which posits that personal behavior is influenced by group perceptions (Hughes et al., 2015; Tajfel & Turner, 2004), may help us

TABLE 2

**Descriptive Statistics and Correlations
for the Colorism Subscales**

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Racism (DAS-DQ)	20.70	8.71	-										
2. Colorism (ICS)	46.10	11.00	.27***	-									
3. Self-Concept (ICS)	14.30	3.98	.09	.33***	-								
4. Impression Formation (ICS)	7.97	3.42	.02	.38***	.27***	-							
5. Affiliation (ICS)	7.60	3.10	.01	.32***	.13*	.49***	-						
6. Attraction (ICS)	8.06	3.36	.05	.31***	.08	.50***	.45***	-					
7. Upward Mobility (ICS)	9.09	4.00	.09	.25***	.22***	.41***	.30***	.41***	-				
8. Hair Texture Discrepancy (HTD)	9.42	1.99	.12*	.14*	-.02	.08	.06	.09	.02	-			
9. Frequency of Relaxing (FRHS)	3.36	1.07	.03	.09	-.06	.10	.15**	.11	.06	.04	-		
10. Hair Texture Dissatisfaction Scale (HTDSS)	4.15	1.06	.13**	.19***	.02	.16*	.04	.25***	.20***	.20***	.18**	-	
11. Ideal Hair Texture	3.60	1.67	.02	-.11	.01	-.08	-.11	-.23***	.02	-.20***	-.19***	-.49***	-

Note. $N = 316$; $df = 315$

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$

to better understand this finding. When Black women feel their hair texture leads to negative judgments and lower status for their ingroup, it may lead to increased dissatisfaction with their hair and attempts to change it.

The Self-Concept and Affiliation subscales did not correlate with the hair texture measures however. This null finding may reflect subtle distinctions in how hair texture dissatisfaction and colorism interact with social identity. The Self-Concept subscale focuses on personal self-worth related to one's hair texture (e.g., "My hair texture is an important part of my self-concept"), while the Affiliation subscale addresses the desire to connect with others based on shared traits (e.g., "Most of my friends tend to have the same hair texture"). Social identity theory posits that individuals derive their self-concept from group membership and intergroup comparisons (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). It is possible that while the Attraction, Upward Mobility, and Impression Formation subscales directly engage with broader social judgments about hair texture, the Self-Concept and Affiliation subscales may reflect more intrinsic, stable aspects of identity that are less directly tied to external perceptions of hair texture.

Because of both cosmetic and serious health consequences of hair relaxant consumption, we examined how frequency of use was associated with these other constructs. We observed that hair texture dissatisfaction was associated with the use of chemical relaxants, aligning with prior research showing that hair texture dissatisfaction relates to the use of hair straightening products (Harper & Choma, 2019). Wanting an ideal hair texture that was straighter was related to chemical relaxants use, suggesting that women who aspire to a particular hair texture—perhaps influenced by Eurocentric beauty norms—are more likely to consume these hazardous products, even in the absence of a pronounced discrepancy with their natural texture. This finding is consistent with prior research showing that internalization of Eurocentric beauty ideals can influence grooming behaviors and the adoption of beauty practices aimed at meeting these standards (Awad et al., 2015). Additionally, the desire for straighter hair texture was associated with both measures of hair texture dissatisfaction. These findings are consistent with social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), which suggests that societal ideals can influence personal identity and influence self-presentation. Contrary to expectations, the hazardous use of chemical hair relaxing was not related to perceived racism and colorism, although it was associated dissatisfaction with one's hair. Notably, hair texture dissatisfaction was associated with perceived racism and colorism. While this study was statistically underpowered to fully explore these

relationships, future research should examine whether hair texture dissatisfaction acts as a mediator between sociocultural forces such as racism and colorism and the use of hazardous hair products.

Limitations and Future Directions

The current study had several limitations. One of the most limiting factors was the inclusion of only Black women who had reported the use of hazardous chemical hair relaxant products within the past year. A more comprehensive comparison of this targeted group to those women who have never used such chemicals remains to be completed. Our decision to target this specific population was informed by the prevalence of reported chemical relaxant use among Black women (Bellinger, 2007; Harper & Choma, 2019) and the study's aim to better understand the implications of this beauty practice.

Prior research shows that Black women partake in many hair-altering methods such as hot combing, ironing the hair, and sew-ins (Rucker Wright et al., 2011). Further, the terms "relaxant" and "perm" may be used synonymously in social settings, despite having very different outcomes for hair texture. Chemical relaxers were not differentiated from perms in the inclusion criteria. Future research should clearly define a chemical relaxer for participants. Additionally, future research will need to develop broader measures of alternative styling that encompass Black women's repertoire to more fully understand how hair "behavior" relates to hair dissatisfaction and racism and colorism.

Second, approximately 11% of women did not rate our self-developed hair texture discrepancy scale (HTD) as representative of their hair type. This may reflect difficulties in matching the online visual scale to one's hair or failure to capture the kinkiest of hair textures. Future investigation should consider why Black women could not find representation within the developed scale despite a wide array of hair textures. Further, the present study faces several limitations related to the measures employed, particularly with the self-developed hair texture discrepancy scale (HTD) and the validation status of other instruments. The HTD scale's response options for measuring hair relaxant usage are notably unbalanced, ranging from "never" to "almost every day." Given the potent chemicals in hair relaxers, it is improbable that most participants would use them "almost every day." Future research may aim to use qualitative data involving asking participants to report the exact number of times they have used hair relaxers in the past year or may further account for a variety of hair-altering products. Additionally, as this study is among the first of its kind, many of the measures utilized have not undergone validation. Although the ICS and DAS-DQ scales have

been well-validated, the revised version of the SCSS has not, introducing potential uncertainties in data analysis. The scarcity of validated instruments tailored to populations of color underscores the ongoing challenges in this area of research. As scholarship increasingly focuses on these populations, the development and validation of appropriate measures will be critical for enhancing the reliability of future studies.

Another salient limitation was that this study took place on an online platform, meaning that all participants were required to have reliable access to the Internet. This makes it difficult to include those from low socioeconomic (SES) or rural communities with little to no internet access. Research proposes that there is an imbalance in communication resources between urban and rural communities, creating a digital gap (Zhang et al., 2021). At almost every income level, rural households are less likely to own computers than those in urban areas (Consumers Union, 1999, as cited in Strover, 2001). It is plausible that the majority of participants come from fairly urbanized areas, making it critical to highlight potential differences in perceived levels of racism and colorism. Future studies should consider utilizing community-based samples to better account for Black women across the country.

Conclusion and Clinical Implications

Our findings, though modest, highlight how prejudicial social forces (e.g., racism and colorism) relate to Black women's feelings about their hair texture and beauty behaviors. Given recent findings that use of chemical relaxants can not only be damaging to one's hair, but also linked to increased rates of breast, uterine, and ovarian cancers (Chang et al., 2022; Stiel et al., 2016), we echo Lowy and colleagues' (2021, p. 323) call to encourage scientists to apply "culturally sensitive and intersectionality-informed theory" to improve future body image research that is more inclusive and addresses the unique needs of women of color. Drawing on social identity theory, this initial investigation of these constructs underscore how group identification and societal expectations may influence personal behaviors. Black women may engage in hair straightening practices (e.g., chemical relaxants) as a way to conform to dominant beauty standards, which are often defined by Eurocentric ideals. Despite the limitations of this study, future research should examine additional hair-altering methods, rather than just chemical relaxants, in relation to perceived racism, colorism, and hair texture discrepancy and dissatisfaction. Further, considering the documented dangers of using products such as chemical relaxants, future research needs to specifically examine why women are using them and advocate for policies

regulating their sale and usage.

We encourage future research on perceptions of hair texture dissatisfaction and hair presentation among Black women. The development of valid scales to measure hair texture dissatisfaction is critical for advancing literature on underrepresented groups. This study demonstrated that both the dissatisfaction scale and our self-developed hair texture discrepancy scale, especially its ideal hair texture component, may have value in this future research. These scales are also pivotal in addressing the prevalence of potentially harmful beauty practices within the Black community. This study lays the groundwork for more rigorous empirical research on how cultural forces influence the behavior and body image concerns of Black women, with the goal of fostering greater satisfaction with their appearance.

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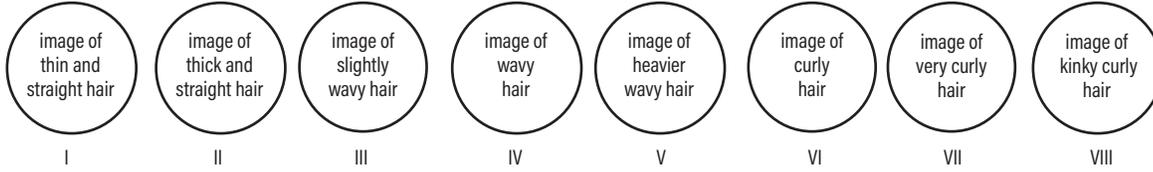
APPENDIX A

Hair Texture Discrepancy (HTD)

Discrepancy Score: Based on the hair texture chart below, please indicate your:

1. Natural hair texture without styling: _____

2. Ideal hair texture: _____



Note. The raw score was calculated by taking the rating for #1 minus #2. In order to avoid a possible score of a negative number, a constant value of +8 was added to all scores to allowing for statistical analysis to be run. To view the eight hair images used for the current study, see Loussouarn et al. (2007).

APPENDIX B

Frequency of Relaxing History Scale (FRHS)

A relaxer is a lotion or cream-based treatment used to chemically straighten curly and textured hair.

Use the Likert scale to answer the question below:

0 -----1 -----2 -----3 -----4 -----5 -----6
never once a year less than once a year a few times a year a few times a month at least once a week almost every day

In the past year, how often have you used any of the following permanent hair straightening products?

- Dark & Lovely Triple Nourished Silkening Relaxer
- ORS Olive Oil Built-In Protection Full Application No-Lye Hair Relaxer
- SoftSheen Carson No-Lye Relaxer
- Profectiv Mega Growth Relaxer
- Soft Beautiful Botanicals No Lye Sensitive Scalp Relaxer
- Hawaiian Silky Crème Conditioning No Base Relaxer
- Silk Elements Shea Butter Relaxer
- Motions Professional Hair Relaxer
- Silicon Mix Cream Hair Relaxer
- Revlon Professional Creme Relaxer
- Design Essentials Conditioning Relaxer

APPENDIX C

Hair Texture Satisfaction Scale (Adapted from Skin Color Satisfaction Scale; Falconer & Neville, 2000)

- 9 = extremely dissatisfied/strongly disagree
 8 = mostly disagree
 7 = disagree
 6 = slightly disagree
 5 = neutral
 4 = slightly agree
 3 = agree
 2 = mostly agree
 1 = extremely satisfied/strongly agree

- a) How satisfied are you with the texture of your own hair?
 d) Compared to the hair texture of members of my family, I am satisfied with my hair texture
 e) I wish the texture of my hair was less curly. (Reverse coded)
 f) I wish my hair was more curly (Reverse coded)
 g) Compared to the hair texture of other Black women, I am satisfied with my hair texture.

1 = extremely straight/much straighter to 9 = extremely curly/much curlier

- (b) Compared to most other Black women, I believe my hair texture is _____
 (c) If I could change my hair texture, I would make it straighter or curlier _____

Note. The revision made to the original SCSS was changing "skin color" to "hair texture" for all items. For item (e) "lighter" was changed to "less curly" and for item (f), "lighter" was changed to "straighter." For items (g) and (b) "African American" was changed to "Black women". Hair texture dissatisfaction scores will be calculated by reverse coding items (e) and (f) as higher scores on these items will indicate hair texture dissatisfaction.

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