



American Ignorance and the Discourse of Manageability Concerning the Care and Presentation of Black Hair

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Abstract

A culturally cultivated ignorance with regard to the care and presentation of tightly-curved hair pervades American society. This ignorance masquerades as a discourse of manageability, which supports institutional prohibitions of historically Black American hairstyles. In other words, rather than acknowledging our knowledge deficits, we attribute the medical and aesthetic consequences of our ignorance to the hair itself. The insidious implication is that the display of tightly curled hair is not a matter of taste but indicative of a lack of self-care. I conclude that this trend is racially prejudicial and that laws and education are possible mechanisms of redress.

Keywords Black hair · Ignorance · Racism · Education

“Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.” – Audre Lorde, “A Burst of Light” (Lorde 1988)

Historically, the academic study and analysis of the hair textures and hairstyles common among Black Americans—namely Black hair and Black hairstyles—has been framed as a political inquiry. While hair texture varies among Black Americans, *Black* hair generally refers to hair that is tightly curled or “kinky,” in contradistinction to “white,” straight hair. Black hairstyles are those that showcase the unique affordances of tightly curled hair; such styles include afros, cornrows, twists, and locs. Thus, scholars pose some version of the question: what do Black hairstyle choices suggest about the Black political consciousness (Mercer 1987)? For instance, if, as a Black American, I straighten my tightly curled hair, does that mean that I have internalized white, European standards of beauty (Rooks 2000; Banks 2000)? Or, do my (dread)locs justifiably inspire *dread* or betray me as a dissident (A. Byrd and Tharps 2002, 127; Lorde 2011)? Or, does my shaved head convey an

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“investment in hegemonic forms of [B]lack masculinity” (Johnson 2010, 154; Kelley 1995)? Or, does my afro express pride in my Black racial identity (Kelley 1997; Ford 2015)?

The problem with questions like these is that unlike complexion, and in spite of its genetically determined characteristics, hair is, as dermatologists Crystal Aguh and Ginette Okoye note, “one of the few physical features that can be easily altered in its shape, color, and length” (Aguh and Okoye 2017, 17). In short, while hair texture is an immutable racial characteristic, hair-styles are “mutable.” This means that even though there are social and institutional pressures to style the hair of Black Americans in some ways rather than others, many of which are arguably *proxies* for racial discrimination, legally and politically hairstyle discrimination is not obviously racial discrimination; Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 only protects against discrimination based upon *immutable* characteristics. And on the personal level, the proximate reasons that any of us might provide for resisting or acquiescing to these social and institutional pressures are varied and idiosyncratic. Thus, Black hairstyle choices fail to be consistent or faithful indicators of the Black political consciousness. So, while singer-songwriter India.Arie wears long locs and seems to be a proud advocate of “natural” Black hairstyles, we must respect her 2006 protest that “I am not my hair”; for at the end of the day, it is just hair.

Rather than asking what does Black hair *mean*, this analysis attends to the concrete effects—sociological, medical, economic, epistemological—of the hairstyle choices made by Black Americans. Drawing insights from two contemporary, Black hair trends—a) the education of #teamnatural and b) the persistence of *pseudofolliculitis barbae* (PFB)—I argue that a culturally cultivated knowledge gap with regard to the care and presentation of Black hair pervades American society in general but also the Black American community in particular. I argue that our common cultural literacy grants the average American quite a bit of information on how to care for and style “white,” straight hair. By the same token, Americans in general, including Black Americans, know surprisingly little about how to care for tightly curled hair as it grows naturally out of our heads and bodies, not to mention how to style it “professionally” or even “beautifully.”

Furthermore, I argue that this epistemological asymmetry masquerades as a *discourse of manageability*. In other words, rather than recognizing that we do not know the “rules” of caring for kinky or curly hair—to borrow a term from stylist Anthony Dickey (2003)—we attribute the dermatological and aesthetic consequences of our ignorance to the hair itself. The implication is that kinky hair is itself *unmanageable*, and its proper care involves compelling it to mimic the curl pattern and characteristic styles of “white” people. Consequently, we observe in many “respectable” public spaces today in 2020, the persistence of prohibitions on cornrows, twists, locs, and afros—and even stylized fades—under the facially neutral guises of cleanliness, professionalism, or uniformity. The pernicious implication is that the display of naturally curly hair is not a matter of taste—measuring poorly on some white, European scale of beauty—but indicative of a lack of self-care. I contend that the discourse of manageability is based upon a general ignorance about Black hair and is ultimately racially prejudicial and harmful.

There are at least two advantages to (re)framing the study of Black hair primarily in terms of knowledge/ignorance rather than politics. First, we can explain some of the reasons that individuals might succumb to cultural pressures and persist in some of their hair care habits and styling preferences, even in the face of health concerns and economic burdens: in short, many individuals simply do not know how to care for their hair. Second, we acquire a critical lens through which we can denounce public prohibitions of Black hairstyles: characterizations

of Black hairstyles as categorically unprofessional, unclean, or unkempt evidence institutionalized misinformation about Black hair maintenance and presentation. In both cases, framing a racial problem in terms of ignorance positions education efforts as a meaningful manner of redress and an effective mechanism of seeding anti-racism.

I will begin with a brief, *political* history of noteworthy moments in the care and presentation of Black hair, attending to some of the limits of the political frame of analysis. I will then present two contemporary trends that exemplify the American culturally cultivated ignorance. The education of #teamnatural consists of the trend whereby many Black Americans who decide to wear their hair “naturally” for the first time in adulthood find themselves embarking on a rigorous path of self-education, learning basic facts about their hair for the first time as adults (Gill, 2015). The persistence of PFB, or “razor bumps,” is a condition that arises when many Black Americans remove the hair on their faces or bodies in a poor manner, yielding grave dermatological consequences. Among Black men, for instance, razor bumps are one of the chief dermatological complaints with recent estimates suggesting that at least half and as many as 80% of Black men suffer from this condition to some degree (Aguh and Okoye 2017, 123). Given the relatively simple, medical solution—*shave properly* with respect to the nature of one’s hair—razor bumps present as a dermatological epidemic born of ignorance. I will conclude with a discussion of the discourse manageability and respectability with reference to several popular and legal anecdotes.

A brief (political) history of black hair

The political history of Black Hair in the United States begins, for the most part, at the turn of the twentieth century, between 1905 and 1910, when Sarah McWilliams, better known as Madam C.J. Walker, builds her hair care empire. Ayana Byrd and Lori Tharps explain that in the hair “quest for straightness and ‘manageability,’” Walker introduced “the Walker system, the ‘shampoo-press-and-curl’ method of straightening hair that was to become the foundation of the Black beautician industry” (Byrd and Tharps 2002, 88). Walker is also largely responsible for popularizing the use of the hot comb among Black women, since it was a standard item included in the Walker hair care kit. Another hair moment in 1910 is when the boxer, Jack Johnson, soundly defeats the white, former champion Jeff Jeffries. Johnson’s victory triggered a violent, white backlash in the form of a race riot (Reimann 2017; Ward 2010, 217), yet, it also had the effect of popularizing the bald head among Black men, which was the way that Johnson wore his “hair” (ibid., 107). From the 1940s through the 1960s, the “conk” was a popular hairstyle worn by many Black men. A conk involved using a lye-based cream to straighten the hair. In 1954, George E. Johnson creates the first “‘permanent’ straightening system that could be purchased at retail and applied in the home” (185). The “perm” largely supplanted, but did not completely replace, the use of the hot comb for hair straightening. In 1969, Angela Davis’ afro’d image attains national recognition, thanks to the FBI. In 1977, the Jheri Curl gains popularity but quickly dies when Michael Jackson’s hair ignites during a commercial shoot in 1984. In 1981, Robert Nesta Marley dies; his rise to international stardom, along with the growing popularity of reggae music, greatly contributed to the visibility and nascent popular appeal of (dread)locs. And since 1990, the weave has grown to become an almost commonplace accessory among Black female celebrities and professionals but also among Black women more generally.

I call this a “political” history because each of these styles has incurred political interpretations. While hair straightening was popular, there have always been influential voices who criticized the practice as self-denigrating. The notable sociologist, E. Franklin Frazier, sharply criticized Madam Walker for allegedly teaching Black people how “to rid himself of his black or dark complexion, or how he can straighten his hair” (qtd. in Bundles 2001, 20). In her defense, Madame Walker viewed her products in very different terms and never sold bleaching creams. As A’Lelia Bundles explains:

[H]er Walker System was intended to treat the scalp disease that was so rampant when in the early 1900s, women washed their hair only once a month. “Right here let me correct the erroneous impression held by some that I claim to straighten hair,” she told a reporter in 1918 after she had been called the “de-kink queen” by a white reporter. “I deplore such an impression because I have always held myself as a hair culturist. I grow hair.” (Bundles 2001, 20)

Another notable critic of hair straightening was Marcus Garvey, founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association. Garvey is known for having proclaimed in a speech, “Don’t remove the kinks from your hair. Remove them from your brain” (qtd. in A. Byrd and Tharps 2002, 96). And in a caustic 1923 editorial, criticizing W. E. B. Du Bois, Garvey explicitly equates hair straightening practices with Black self-denigration and white idolization. He says,

It is no wonder that Du Bois seeks the company of white people, because he hates blacks as being ugly [...] all that is black is ugly, and all that is white is beautiful [...] This probably is accountable for the bleaching processes and hair straightening escapades of some of the people who are identified with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in their mad desire of approach to the white race, in which they see beauty as advocated by the professor from Harvard and Berlin. (Garvey 1986, 233–34)

It is matter of historical record that Garvey and Du Bois had a contentious relationship, which may account for the caustic *ad hominem* in the quote above. Nevertheless, while it is certainly plausible that some Black people straightened their hair for the reasons that Garvey notes, the only reliable inference that we can draw from such a hairstyle choice is that that person wanted straight hair at that time. We might speculate as to *why* people would want to style their hair in this manner, but adhering to white standards of beauty is only one motivation.

The most famous account and criticism of the conk appears in the autobiography of El Hajj Malik El Shabazz, also known as Malcolm X. Recalling his days as “Detroit Red,” he says:

How ridiculous I was! Stupid enough to stand there simply lost in admiration of my hair now looking “white,” reflected in the mirror in Shorty’s room. I vowed that I’d never again be without a conk, and I never was for many years. // This was my first really big step toward self-degradation: when I endured all of that pain, literally burning my flesh to have it look like a white man’s hair. I had joined that multitude of Negro men and women in America who are brainwashed into believing that the black people are “inferior”—and white people “superior”—that they will even violate and mutilate their God-created bodies to try to look “pretty” by white standards. (Malcolm 1992, 56–57)

Similar to the criticism of hair straightening among Black women, it is certainly plausible that many Black men conked their hair for some of the reasons Shabazz notes; and at least in the case of Shabazz, he discloses that he desired to look white. Nevertheless, it is evident, even in Shabazz’s

account, that in spite of the conk's implicit proximity to whiteness, there was no illusion that Black men were actually "whitened" by wearing it. Maxine Craig explains that in contrast to the conservatism of Black women who straightened their hair, "The conk was an expression of marginalized masculinity [...] It was a hairstyle of the hipster, a way to advertise one's rejection of the limited and demeaning hairstyles available to black men" (Craig 1997, 405). Shabazz himself reflects that his presentation was conspicuous rather than conservative. He recounts:

Off the train, I'd go through that Grand Central Station afternoon rush hour crowd, and many white people simply stopped in their tracks to watch me pass. The drape and the cut of a zoot suit showed to the best advantage if you were tall—and I was over six feet. My conk was fire-red. I was really a clown, but my ignorance made me think I was "sharp." (1992, 164)

Dressed in this manner, Detroit Red makes no pretention of passing for white; his clothes and hair made him conspicuously Black. Neither conked nor "permed" hair looks "white"; it looks simply like straightened Black hair.

As further evidence of the sort of masculinity associated with the conk, Craig shares an illuminating anecdote. In 1960, Philadelphia Justice, Juanita Stout, a Black woman, made headlines when she "ordered twenty-five conk-wearing defendants to cut their hair" (Craig 1997, 408). Stout's concern was not that they were imitating white men, especially in light of the fact that she herself wore her hair like many Black women of the day, straightened. She viewed the conk as "a sign of delinquency," "unsanitary and injurious to the scalp," and it made "boys look like girls" (ibid.). Craig concludes, insightfully, that the meaning of the conk for Black men ultimately must be viewed in terms of "gender as well as race," since straightened hair had different meanings when worn by men and women (409).

The bald head has also had its political interpretations. From Jack Johnson in 1910 to Michael Jordan in the late 1980s and early 90s, the Black bald head has connoted a certain kind of Black maleness. In 1910, it was the style of the man who knocked out Jeff Jeffries and thus a symbolic rebuke to whiteness. In the 1990s, it was the style of one of greatest basketball players, and thus the symbol of a kind of Black genius in an anti-black world.

One notable critic of the Black bald head is the scholar E. Patrick Johnson who characterizes the style as a "performance of Black hypermasculinity" (Johnson 2010). Johnson argues that the Black bald head is an explicit effort by Black men to inspire sexual desire in women and/or fear in other men. He explains that the Black bald head is suggestive of "a walking phallus," which alludes to and provokes the "historical construction of the black man as a bestial, animalistic, rapist" (148). He continues, "the heterosexual black male reappropriated this image of the hypersexual, hypermasculine black male to use the racist image to his advantage, as a mode of protection and empowerment" (148); and "Black homosexual men have also appropriated this hairstyle in an attempt to recoup their own black masculine identity" (147). Johnson also describes his own experience of shaving his head after years of wearing his hair long. He claims that his new look garnered "more attention from potential suitors" who, Johnson infers, fetishized his expression of hegemonic masculinity (154). He also observed that some people now perceived him as "threatening"; this surprised him because, as he notes, "I'm gay I thought that I would never experience that kind of raced-based fear" (152).¹

While it is plausible that some men might shave their head in an effort to "scatter the pigeons," i.e. to wield racist imagery in the service of intimidating others, a much simpler explanation could account for their choice similar to the critical analyses of hair straightening and the conk. Most Black

men shave their heads, arguably, as a stylish way to manage their androgenic alopecia. This is the case for Johnson himself, by his own account, and I would wager for Michael Jordan and Jack Johnson as well. And while our style choices have political meanings beyond our control, positive and pernicious, these meanings do not necessarily betray our political commitments, nor our investment—implicit or not—in pathological theories of masculinity.²

Briefly, two other styles that have incurred notable political interpretations include the Afro and Locs. The Afro became one of the symbols of Black Power and the signature stylistic endorsement of the slogan, “Black is Beautiful.” Yet, with regard to Davis’s legacy in particular, she laments, “I am remembered as a hairdo [...] It is humiliating because it reduces a politics of liberation to a politics of fashion” (Snyder 1994). The fact that the political imperatives of Black Power can be reduced in the American popular imaginary to a hair style offers further evidence that hair styles do not betray political commitments. For instance, Davis’s “hairstyle has changed, but her political beliefs haven’t” (Snyder 1994).

Similarly, the popularity of locs developed amidst political stigmatization. Referring to locs as “dreads” followed from the pernicious suggestion that the wearers were to be feared, as a dreaded people. As a personal anecdote, I recall an international trip I took in the early 1990s with a youth group to the small island nation of Tortola. One of our adult chaperones, however, was barred from entering the country because he wore his hair in locs, which allegedly marked him as a dissident. Another shocking manifestation of this fear occurred in Philadelphia in 1985 when members of the organization MOVE, all of whom wore their hair in locs, became embroiled in a shootout with the Philadelphia police. The showdown concluded, ultimately, when Police Commissioner Gregore J. Sambor ordered the bombing of the MOVE rowhouse, destroying sixty homes and killing eleven people, including five children (Gelb 2015; McCoy 2010; Byrd and Tharps 2002, 264). Like Johnson’s interpretation of the bald head, some people might wear locs as a form of political protest. Yet many more people, arguably, wear locs for idiosyncratic and personal reasons. Rastafarians, for instance, wear locs as part of their religious practice. Currently, there is a recent qualified acceptance of the hairstyle in some professional spaces.

Political interpretations have attended every Black hairstyle. Upon close scrutiny, the primary concern of these interpretations is not the hair itself but the American meanings associated with Black racial identity in general. This is evidenced in part by the historical trend whereby non-Black individuals adopt Black hairstyles with very different receptions. Indeed, some non-Black individuals have curly hair, and some Black hairstyles can be accomplished with straight hair, albeit with much greater effort; these non-Black individuals are not treated like Black Americans. For instance, actor Bo Derek famously wore cornrows in 1979, briefly popularizing the style among white women. Suddenly cornrows were rebranded “Bo Derek braids,” angering and frustrating many Black Americans. Roberta Flack inveighed at the time, “Black women were wearing cornrows long before Bo Derek” (Byrd and Tharps 2002, 202). And locs are popular among some straight-haired, white Americans; the most negative criticism that they garner is that they are unkempt and are a poor style choice that might be readily reversed.

Ultimately, the political interpretations of Black hair do not account for many of the choices to style it in one manner or another. Furthermore, political accounts of Black hair are not constructive, meaning that they often criticize the choice but do not propose adequate avenues to resist and redress the institutional pressures that the political interpretations identify. I argue that framing the analysis of Black hair in terms of knowledge, or the lack thereof, better diagnoses the motivations for hairstyle choices and the socio-political context of those decisions. I also suggest a manner of seeding

resistance, namely education. In the next section, I present two examples of what I characterize as sites of culturally cultivated ignorance with regard to the care and presentation of Black hair: the informal education of #teamnatural and the persistence of *pseudofolliculitis barbae* (PFB).

Two sites of culturally cultivated ignorance

The informal education of #teamnatural

The Natural Hair Movement names the cultural trend that has gained momentum over the last twenty years, where Black women in particular, collectively referred to on social media as #teamnatural, are deciding not to straighten their hair with a “permanent” relaxer. As noted above, the reasons that any individual might provide for making this decision are varied and idiosyncratic. Some simply would like a change in their hair styling options, while others find their current hair care regimen too expensive and believe that the cost of natural hair care will be more affordable. As it turns out, the cost of natural hair care products and services is at least comparable to the cost of receiving regular relaxers and can be much more expensive while we learn about our hair. For others, the decision to transition is motivated by health concerns. Hair treated with a relaxer is more fragile; it is more likely to break or acquire split ends than untreated hair. Consequently, growing hair that has been relaxed is more difficult. Also, hair relaxers consist of caustic chemicals that may damage the scalp (Aguh and Okoye 2017). And most concerning, recent research suggests that the use of hair relaxers increases the risk of developing breast cancer among African American women (Stiel et al. 2016; Llanos et al. 2017; Brinton et al. 2018).

In this section, however, I am less interested in understanding the motives for transitioning to #teamnatural. More concretely, I wish to analyze the obstacles that Black Americans face once they have decided not to use a permanent relaxer. One of the greatest challenges is knowledge. As Black Americans, we lack answers to basic questions like, what is my particular hair texture? If we have had some occasion to handle our hair while unprocessed and at any length, all we might know is that it is not straight. Moreover, the descriptive vocabulary in the popular imaginary comprises an amorphous tangle of pejorative terms that cue a set of shaming rituals that I characterize as the discourse of manageability, which I will discuss below. Many of us are also unaware of the amount of effort that is entailed in caring for our curly hair. We mistakenly believe that rather than “artificially” coercing our hair to mimic a “white” curl pattern, we will allow it simply to grow, like a low-maintenance house-plant. Kobena Mercer notes in his classic essay, “Black Hair/Style Politics,” that the metaphor of “natural” hair is ultimately misleading. He says, “hair is never a straightforward biological ‘fact’ because it is almost always groomed, prepared, cut, concealed and generally ‘worked upon’ by human hands” (Mercer 1987, 34). The effort required to care for “natural” hair is comparable to many other styling choices, and, often the effort is greater in light of our lack of knowledge.

In the American popular imaginary, we generally know a lot about how to clean and detangle straight and wavy hair, even if we do not have hair of that type or many occasions to handle it. The average American, Black or white, might already know that straight hair needs to be washed frequently because of the efficiency with which sebum secreted from the scalp coats the hair shaft, resulting in a tendency to become oily. We also probably know that one detangles straight hair by passing a comb or brush through the strands, hence the linguistic fact that “combing” or “brushing” one’s hair is practically *synonymous* with detangling it. Finally,

we might know that at night, one might contain long hair in “French braid” or simply allow it to fall indifferently on the pillow with minimal consequences.

By contrast, in the American popular imaginary, we do not know much about how to care for tightly curled hair. For instance, unless one has had an occasion to handle it, we might not know that tightly curled hair tends to be dry because the shape of the hair shaft prevents sebum secreted from the scalp from coating it easily; thus, a special effort must be made to add and/or retain moisture in the hair when cleaning it and during routine care. Also, we probably do not know that tightly curled hair has a measurably higher tendency to form “simple knots” (Khumalo and Callender 2008, 484). Consequently, the use of a comb, even a wide-toothed tool like an afro pick, significantly increases the likelihood of hair breakage. Electron micrograph images show that contrary to popular myths, healthy Black hair, i.e. tightly curled or kinky, that has not been chemically straightened is *not* inherently more fragile than “white” or “Asian” hair. Yet, the tightly curled shape of Black hair imbues it with an increased “mechanical fragility” (ibid.). Dermatologists advise that, beyond a certain length, “Manually detangling with the fingers or wide tooth combs from the hair ends to the root is the proper method to detangle hair” (Aguh and Okoye 2017, 98). Additionally, we should “decrease the amount of friction on the hair,” and as often as possible, braid or twist the hair into a protective, “lengthened state.” Also, while sleeping, we should wrap the hair in a material other than cotton, such as silk or satin, and/or “pineapple” the hair into a loose bunch atop the head (Aguh and Okoye 2017, 98).

Similarly, in terms of presentation, the American popular imaginary “understands” straight hair quite well. Styles all build on a metaphor of verticality and gravity: straight hair falls. One might wear their hair *up* in a “ponytail” or (man) bun, or *down* one’s back or over the shoulders. Hair at the front edge of our hairline can be cut short to form “bangs” that fall across our forehead or dramatically into our face. As evidence of its relationship to gravity, the hair moves and undulates as we shake our head. And if the hair is too short to lay across our scalp, then it spikes straight up. If we are losing our hair in the typical “male pattern,” we might comb it over to lay across the thin place and disguise symptoms of the androgenic alopecia.

By contrast, tightly curled hair does not fall; it expands. It can be styled to fall, but otherwise it defies gravity. Rather than up or down, tightly curled hair is worn back or out. Toni Morrison describes her protagonist’s afro in her last novella, *God Help the Child*, “like a floating piece of sculpture, like a million black butterflies asleep on her head” (Morrison 2015, 131). This alternate physics of styling betrays additional components of our culturally cultivated ignorance. While we understand the idioms and connotations of various ‘white’ styles, there are no ready idioms to help us anticipate, for instance, whether our Black hair that is worn out is attractive.

This culturally cultivated knowledge gap is further evidenced by the strong collective interest of #teamnatural in self-education. Stylist Anthony Dickey notes:

In my work I started to see a parallel between the needs of my high-profile clients, with their access to the very best, and the needs of the working girl. Across the board there is not a large demand for information on how to care for hair other than straight hair. Nonstraight hair, ranging from kinky to wavy, has only recently become ‘respectable’ rather than assigned to be covered up or disguised. Whether kinky, curly, or wavy, the assault on nonstraight hair’s various textures, whether from ignorance or lack of positive imagery, has subsided. *Now more than ever, women want to know how to care for and style it properly.* (Dickey 2003, 153–54; emphasis added)

On the most basic level, understanding our hair texture determines the appropriate kinds of care that it needs. One popular method of categorizing hair texture uses a number and letter system, ranging from 1A—stick straight—to 4C—tightly curled or kinky. Between these are “type 2,” which is wavy, and “type 3,” which is curly (Aguh and Okoye 2017, 12).

Most people turn to online tutorials, which have been an invaluable resource for facilitating this self-education. Tiffany Gill notes: “Online spaces have become the first to which many black women turn for advice, support, and community, especially when embarking on what many call their ‘natural hair journey’” (Gill, 2015, 74). There are innumerable natural hair blogs and YouTube channels supported by a multi-million-dollar natural hair product industry. Here, we can find a personal tutor with a similar hair texture who will guide us through whatever care or styling technique we have the time and patience to learn.

Finally, in addition to health and beauty, there is a secondary benefit to learning about one’s own hair, namely increased self-esteem. Tracey Lewis-Elligan conducted a series of workshops where parents and children—as it turns out the groups consisted almost entirely of mothers and daughters—were taught how to braid their hair. In addition to teaching natural hair care practices and braiding techniques, the workshops sought to build self-esteem among the participants. Lewis-Elligan concludes that “The hair braiding model contributes an asset-based approach that ultimately can be used to promote the health and well-being of African-American children” (Spellers and Moffitt 2010, 341). Similarly, the experience of learning to care for our own hair as it grows naturally out of heads and bodies imbues us with a renewed self-confidence.

Unlearning harmful shaving techniques

Commonly known as ‘razor bumps’ or ‘in-grown hairs,’ *pseudofolliculitis barbae* (PFB)—or in the UK *pseudofolliculitis cutis*—is “a chronic inflammatory condition that is triggered by aberrant hair growth in regions that are subject to traumatic hair removal” (Jasterzbski and Schwartz 2015, 878). The affected regions include, most commonly, the beard area (suggested by the name “barbae”) but also the pubic region or the underarm area. Razor bumps are called a ‘pseudo-’ folliculitis because the inflammatory response is caused by one’s own hair rather than an actual infection from a foreign body (Perry et al. 2002). Dermatologists Jasterzbski and Schwartz explain:

The hair follicles of individuals with tightly curled hair take on a helical arrangement, which causes the hair shaft to exit the skin at an acute angle. When a razor is applied to the skin, the hairs are cut at an angle because of their near parallel relationship to the skin. This sharpens the tips of the hair shafts and gives them the ability to penetrate the skin. The mechanism by which the curled hair perforates the skin then depends on the closeness of the shave. In a moderately close shave by a single-blade razor without stretching the skin, the hairs typically exit the follicle. Because the curled hairs depart at an acute angle close to the skin and have the tendency to coil back towards the epidermis, they can re-enter the epidermis. (Jasterzbski and Schwartz 2015, 879)

This condition manifests primarily on the skin of individuals with tightly curled hair who employ hair removal methods better suited for straight hair, which cut or break the hair *beneath* the surface of the skin. These methods include waxing, plucking, or the inattentive use of a multi-blade. Curly hair that is cut beneath the surface of the skin, particularly those sharpened by an angular cut from a razor, might never exit the skin, growing and penetrating the skin laterally as much as two millimeters beneath the surface. The aberrant hair growth

induces an inflammatory response that encapsulates the hair as if it were a foreign body, forming an often painful and occasionally disfiguring papule or pustule.

The most effective recommended treatment for razor bumps is to allow the hair to grow. If that is not possible, or desirable, one must learn the appropriate techniques for shaving tightly curled hair. Proper shaving methods include:

- (i) using guarded razors or electric trimmers that are clean and sharp; (ii) shaving in the direction of hair growth without stretching the skin; (iii) washing the area with warm water and antibacterial soap before shaving; (iv) using a generous amount of shaving lotion; (v) rinsing the shaver with warm water after every stroke; and (vi) applying a posts have formula or moisturizer. (Jasterzbski and Schwartz 2015, 882)

These recommendations account for a few basic considerations. First, the hair should be cut no shorter than one millimeter or *at the surface* of the skin; this increases the likelihood that hairs exit the skin in the first place. Second, the hair shaft should be cut so that the tip is blunt, and a secondary effort should be made to soften the newly cut tip, reducing the hair's capacity for re-penetrating the skin. And finally, since hair removal almost always irritates the skin, one should make an extra effort to clean the skin prior to shaving and to moisturize it during and afterwards, thereby minimizing the occasion for a catalyzing inflammatory response.

Our basic, American cultural literacy about shaving methods favors the removal of straight hair. The top three companies in the US that market shaving products—Gillette, Dollar Shave, and Schick—each promote a razor that includes five or even six blades as their most advanced, most effective, and most “manly” product. For example, the six-bladed “Executive” razor by Dollar Shave, self-described as “the final frontier,” comes with a “heavy-weight aluminum” handle, as contrasted with the “light-weight aluminum” or plastic handles of the four and two-blade razors, respectively. While the multi-blade razor itself is not the cause of razor bumps, extra care must be taken when using one to remove curly hair, and ultimately a single-blade razor is preferred (Perry et al. 2002, 117). The problem with the multi-blade razor is that it enables a close shave even when the blades become relatively dull. Rather than cutting the hair cleanly at the surface of the skin, a relatively dull multi-blade razor will remain somewhat effective though it might pull the hair or stretch the skin before cutting it, thereby increasing the likelihood of cutting the hair *below the surface of the skin*.

I characterize razor bumps as a site of culturally cultivated ignorance because in spite of its prevalence among both men and women, the solution to this epidemic is education; we must learn the appropriate techniques for removing tightly curled hair from our faces and bodies lest we incur the dermatological consequences. In the next section, I will examine some of the institutional pressures that help to maintain this culturally cultivated ignorance with regard to the care and presentation of tightly curled hair.

The discourse of manageability

The epistemological asymmetry that, I contend, represents the experiences of #teamnatural and the pervasiveness of *pseudofolliculitis barbae* masquerades as a *discourse of manageability*. In other words, occluding our recognition, not to mention our understanding, of our culturally cultivated ignorance is the general suggestion that kinky hair is itself *unmanageable*, and its proper care involves straightening it in some capacity or hiding it. Consider that many women

with curly or kinky hair reportedly straighten their hair or the hair of their children precisely because they believe that it is easier to care for and less time consuming to style. Yet, one could argue that the manipulation of kinky or curly takes more time and effort because we have significantly more experience caring for straight or straightened hair. Regardless, we can reliably infer that if someone does not know how to care for curly or kinky hair, then curly or kinky hair will in fact be less manageable. Thus, while the pervasiveness of this belief may be symptomatic of a structural prejudice against curly hair, the belief itself is not the cause.

The greater concern is the institutional pressure that we observe in many “respectable” public spaces such as schools, the US Armed Services, and various professional venues where there are—or have been—explicit prohibitions of hairstyles that feature the affordances of kinky or curly hair—such as cornrows, twists, locs, afros, and stylized fades—collectively, “black hairstyles,” under the presumably neutral rationalizations of cleanliness, neatness, professionalism, or uniformity. Those with long, curly or kinky hair are often expected to straighten it in some capacity, enabling styles where the hair could be worn “down” rather than “out.” And those with short hair are expected—as Toni Morrison’s narrator observes in *The Bluest Eye*—to keep it “cut as close to the scalp as possible to avoid any suggestion of wool” (Morrison 2000, 87). The pernicious implication is that the display of naturally curly hair is not ugly or unattractive but rather “unkempt.”

In various US schools, authorities consistently interpret race-neutral dress codes that emphasize cleanliness and professionalism in ways that exclude black hairstyles.³ For example, gaining national attention in the spring of 2020, authorities at the Barbers Hill High School in Mont Belvieu, Texas revised their interpretation of their dress code concerning male hair length; while previously permitted, male students could no longer wear long hair up in a bun since their hair *could possibly* be worn down, extending “below the eyebrows, or below the earlobes” and constituting a dress code violation (Richards 2019; “BHISD 2019-2020 Student Handbook” 2019, 54–55). Consequently, the school suspended DeAndre Arnold and Kaden Bradford—who happen to be cousins—until they cut their long locs, which they had routinely worn up in a tight bun.

The US Armed Services is another site where, historically, the interpretation of grooming requirements has adversely affected Black service men and women. Prior to 1984, Navy servicemen could wear beards. Since then, however, men in all branches of the military have been expected to “keep their face clean-shaven when in uniform, or in civilian clothes on duty” (“Wear and Appearance of Army Uniforms and Insignia 2017, 5). There are two stated reasons for the prohibition. One, servicemen should appear as uniform as possible, and facial hair inappropriately distinguishes individuals. And two, beards pose a potential safety concern compromising the seal of a chemical-biological protective mask. They also attract debris and other foreign bodies, which increases the risk to servicemen in a toxic environment (“Pseudofolliculitis of the Beard and Acne Keloidalis Nuchae 2014, 12).

Historically, this grooming requirement has exacerbated rates of *pseudofolliculitis barbae* (PFB) among Black servicemen. Sensitive to this tendency of developing PFB upon entering Service, the military has had a long-standing policy of permitting temporary “therapeutic beards” on medical authority in order to treat the condition. The 2014 Army Medical Bulletin on the subject explains that PFB “occurs mainly in African-American/black males [...] due to their genetic predisposition for curly hair” but is not “gender dependent and can occur in any skin area subjected to regular [...] traumatic means of hair removal”; furthermore, “the majority of men with this condition have had insufficient cause to develop this problem before entering military service” (“Pseudofolliculitis of the Beard and Acne Keloidalis Nuchae 2014, 5). The Medical

Bulletin also includes thorough guidelines on appropriate shaving and management techniques, which are consistent with those discussed above. The guidelines also note, as already intimated, that managing PFB “often necessitates the wearing of a beard during some phase of treatment” (5). A supervisor or unit commander, however, always retains “the authority to require that a Soldier’s beard be shaved if the unit is in, or about to enter, a situation where use of a protective mask is required” (12).

Unofficially, however, this medical accommodation has created social and political challenges for Black servicemen. In a Alexander and Delph 1974 report, the authors note that “for the black non-Navy serviceman, wearing a beard can make his life difficult or intolerable, even if the beard has been prescribed by a medical specialist” (Alexander and Delph 1974, 461). In the 1970s, the cultural sentiment in the military considered beards to be “‘unmilitary,’ ‘unhealthy,’ ‘unbecoming,’ [and] ‘unnatural’” (ibid.). Furthermore, beards were often associated with “militants and radicals” (462). Consequently, Black servicemen who followed medical advice regarding PFB were thought of in these terms and unofficially compelled, through discrimination and harassment, to abandon their treatment. There are no current, publicly available reports on the experiences of Black servicemen and PFB. Yet, the 2014 Medical Bulletin includes the illuminating, cautionary remark under “military considerations”:

The commander is acutely aware of the bearded Soldier when he appears in sharp contrast to his clean-shaven counterpart. This encounter can create problems if all parties concerned fail to recognize the necessity for medical treatment. Problems related to morale and discipline should not influence a medical decision for proper treatment of the military patient. The well-motivated Soldier within an informed military community should not create problems relating to morale and discipline because he is receiving legitimate medical therapy. (“Pseudofolliculitis of the Beard and Acne Keloidalis Nuchae 2014, 5)

The suggestion is that absent adequate knowledge and sensitivity among those in command, soldiers following medical advice for PFB could be unduly singled-out, disciplined, and/or harassed. Nevertheless, the military appears to be sensitive to the experiences of Black service men and women, at least with regard to PFB. Veterans can even receive disability benefits for service related PFB.

Military grooming guidelines have affected service men and women in other ways as well. The hairstyle recommendation for servicemen suggesting a “high and tight” haircut has exacerbated rates of *Acne Keloidalis Nuchae* (AKN), primarily, though not exclusively, among African-American men for reasons similar to the pathogenesis of PFB (“Pseudofolliculitis of the Beard and Acne Keloidalis Nuchae 2014, 14). Managing AKN is simpler though, since the “high and tight” hairstyle is not required, unlike the expectation of being clean-shaven; therefore, hair on head can be grown to a “therapeutic” length and still satisfy the general guideline that hairstyles contribute to a uniform, “neat, and conservative” appearance (“Wear and Appearance of Army Uniforms and Insignia 2017, 5).

Until 2014, however, the military interpretation of “neat and conservative” prohibited Black servicewomen from wearing twists, and locs were not permitted until 2017 (Ferdinando 2014; Mele 2017). For instance, the 2005 version of the Army Regulation 671-1: “Wear and Appearance of Army Uniforms and Insignia,” states that, “Dreadlocks (*unkempt, twisted, matted individual parts of hair*) are prohibited in uniform or in civilian clothes on duty” (“Wear and Appearance of Army Uniforms and Insignia 2005, 4; emphasis added). This

general characterization of locs as “unkempt” betrays an ignorance about loc maintenance in particular and arguably kinky/curly hair in general. Ultimately, the Army concedes this point, as evidenced by their expansion of the range of permissible hairstyles. In 2017, Sgt. Maj. Anthony J. Moore of the Army’s office of the deputy chief of staff for personnel remarks, “We understood there was no need to differentiate between locks, cornrows or twists as long as they all met the same dimension” (Mele 2017). The army explains that the general guideline for female hairstyles is that the hair should not “interfere with the proper wear of all uniform headgear. All headgear will fit snugly and comfortably around the largest part of the head without bulging or distortion from the intended shape of the headgear and without excessive gaps” (“Wear and Appearance of Army Uniforms and Insignia 2017, 6). By 2017, the Army conceded that beyond the expectations for the wear of uniform headgear, there was no need to specifically exclude a particular hairstyle, provided it did not otherwise significantly detract from uniformity and neatness.

Professional spaces have been the most pervasive and pernicious site of the articulation and manifestation of the discourse of manageability.⁴ Following the Civil Rights Act of 1964, there have been a number of legal cases alleging that grooming policies in professional spaces are racially discriminatory.⁵ For instance, in 1980, The US Court of Appeals, 3rd Circuit, ruled that Greyhound’s prohibition of beards was *not* racially discriminatory in spite of the policy’s insensitivity to PFB among Black men. The court reasoned that a) the prohibition applied to all employees, b) beards are mutable characteristics, and c) not all otherwise-qualified Black men suffer from PFB. Furthermore, Greyhound employment data during the period of the no-beard policy did not indicate a racial disparity, notwithstanding the example of the plaintiff, Jeffrey Ferguson (1980, 635:192).⁶

More recently, in 2016, the US Court of Appeals 11th Circuit, ruled that the decision by Catastrophe Management Solutions (CMS) to rescind a job offer extended to Chastity Jones due to her refusal to cut her locs did *not* constitute racial discrimination (EEOC v. Catastrophe Management Solutions 2016), and in 2018 the US Supreme court declined to hear the appeal (Gandy 2018). I wish to look more closely at this case because it is particularly instructive. The official CMS policy stated at the time: “All personnel are expected to be dressed and groomed in a manner that projects a professional and businesslike image while adhering to company and industry standards and/or guidelines.... [H]airstyle should reflect a business/professional image. No excessive hairstyles or unusual colors are acceptable” (qtd in EEOC v. Catastrophe Management Solutions 2016, 852:1022). During Jones’s interview, the hiring manager, Jeannie Wilson—who is white—reasoned aloud that “[locs] tend to get messy, although I’m not saying yours are, but you know what I’m talking about” (2016, 852:1021). The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), which filed suit on Jones’s behalf, argued that the characterization of locs as categorically “messy,” and thus in violation of the CMS employee dress policy, is “a form of racial stereotyping” and constitutes *intentional* racial discrimination. The court reasoned that, “discrimination on the basis of black hair texture (an immutable characteristic) is prohibited by Title VII, while adverse action on the basis of hairstyle (a mutable choice) is not” (2016, 852:1030). Consequently, the EEOC did not adequately demonstrate that the policy evidenced discriminatory *intent* and that Jones suffered a “disparate *treatment*.”

In order to prove that the policy evidences disparate *treatment*, the EEOC needed to show

“(i) that [Jones] belongs to a racial minority; (ii) that [she] applied and was qualified for a job for which the employer was seeking applicants; (iii) that, despite [her]

qualifications, [she] was rejected; and (iv) that, after [her] rejection, the position remained open and the employer continued to seek applicants from persons of complainant's qualifications" (McDonnell Douglas Corp. v. Green 1973, 411:802).

In other words, if an employer excludes or dismisses a qualified, Black applicant, for instance, but continues to consider white, similarly-qualified applicants, then the court can reliably infer that the Black applicant was intentional discriminated against, at least in part because they are Black; the court can infer this even if explicitly racial language is entirely absent. EEOC easily established criteria #2, #3, and #4. Jones was qualified but rejected despite those qualifications, and the position remained open subsequently. The EEOC was unable to defend the first criterion, ironically, since Jones's dismissal was on the basis of her hairstyle not her hair texture or her Black racial identity. So, while Jones was indeed dismissed intentionally on the basis of her locs, the court reasoned that her dismissal did not constitute racial discrimination. The EEOC attempted to establish a stronger connection between locs and Blackness by noting that a policy that excludes Black hairstyles effectively excludes Black applicants. The court, however, interpreted these arguments as making a case primarily in terms of the *effects* of the CMS prohibition, as opposed to the intent, and finding that the EEOC had conflated "the two liability theories": disparate *impact/effect* and disparate *treatment* (2016, 852:1025). The court also suggested that the EEOC might have had more success arguing that Jones suffered from the "disparate effect or impact" of the CMS policy.

Nevertheless, the EEOC deliberately framed their argument only in terms of disparate *treatment*. We can speculate about their reasons. First, while disparate impact claims are generally easier to prove, especially following the 1991 amendment to the Civil Rights Act of 1964—namely, the Civil Rights Act of 1991—which explicitly sought to "clarify provisions regarding disparate impact claims," such claims are vulnerable to an easy loophole. The EEOC would have needed to show that the CMS policy disproportionately excluded otherwise-qualified, Black employees. They also would have needed to argue that CMS did *not* have an adequate "business necessity" for enacting the policy (cf. Civil Rights Act of 1991, § 105). While neither discussed by the court nor argued by the EEOC, it certainly seems plausible that the CMS policy might have had such a disparate effect on Black potential employees, but like *EEOC v. Greyhound*, "professionalism" is obviously an adequate business justification to regulate allegedly mutable characteristics. The race-neutral language of the CMS policy does not suggest that Black applicants or their hair textures are innately "unprofessional" or "unkempt."

There is a second, stronger reason for the EEOC strategy. The challenge that the EEOC had to negotiate is that the CMS policy as stated is not racially discriminatory, yet, the *application* of the policy and the interpretation of "professionalism" is. It is this application that is ultimately the real company policy. Thus, in terms of an actionable claim, discriminatory intent better characterizes the prejudicial *application* of a facially-neutral policy. The EEOC argues that attention to the application of a facially neutral policy has a legal precedent; the recent Supreme Court decision of *Peggy Young v. United Parcel Service, Inc* (2015) remarkably articulated the ways in which a facially neutral policy might function as *intentionally* discriminatory. In brief, Young became pregnant while employed by UPS. Young's doctor prohibited her from lifting more than twenty pounds, preventing her from fulfilling many of her responsibilities as a driver. Consequently, she was asked to stay home without pay and eventually lost her employee medical benefits. Her suit alleges that the UPS "pregnancy-blind policy" was *intentionally* discriminatory; UPS should have allowed her to work and

accommodated her in a manner like other drivers who were “similar in their ability or inability to work” (2015, 135:1344), which include those injured on the job, those whose work credentials expired, and those with disabilities as defined by American Disabilities Act. The decisive, and ultimately determinative, question for the court asks: “why, when the employer accommodated so many, could it not accommodate pregnant women as well?” (2015, 135:1355). The court inferred that UPS decided not to accommodate Young *because she was pregnant*, constituting sex discrimination as defined by Title VII. Thus, the Court ruled in Young’s favor, reversing the decision of the Court of Appeals.

Returning to the case of Catastrophe Management Solutions, we can ask, similarly, what are the criteria of interpretation that translates an otherwise neutral policy into a consistent prohibition of Black hairstyles? What are the implicit criteria of professionalism such that locs are categorically precluded? Certainly, instances of any hairstyle could manifest in an unprofessional or unkempt manner, but very few can be determined to be so categorically. Ms. Wilson herself explicitly conceded that Jones’s locs were not messy. Therefore, she should have inferred further that Jones’s locs were *not* “unprofessional,” and by extension that locs in general are not necessarily “unprofessional.” Yet, she rescinded the job offer because locs allegedly *tend* to get messy, betraying a prejudice against locs that is supported by a facially neutral policy. It is evident that Ms. Wilson knows very little about the care and presentation of locs in particular, and arguably Black hair in general, and this ignorance translates the facially neutral employee policy into a racial prejudice.

Two solutions: policy and education

Though anecdotal, this collection of popular and legal cases that I have presented—drawn from school dress codes, the US armed services, and private professional spaces—exemplifies what I describe as the *discourse of manageability*, whereby Black hairstyles are consistently characterized in pejorative but race-neutral terms, such as unprofessional, unclean, unnatural, or unkempt. For instance, DeAndre Arnold and Kaden Bradford’s locs presumably violate the Barbers Hill High School dress code, which aspires “to teach grooming and hygiene, instill discipline, maintain a safe and positive learning environment, prevent disruption, avoid safety hazards, and teach respect for authority” (52). And according to Catastrophe Management Solutions, locs categorically project an unprofessional and/or un-businesslike image. This general misinterpretation of locs in particular, but also Black hairstyles in general, betrays a widespread cultural ignorance concerning the care and presentation of Black hair. This ignorance supports shaming rituals within and beyond the Black American community, such as the discourse concerning “good hair” (see, Stilson 2010; Robinson 2011), and it supports institutional grooming policies that are arguably proxies for racial discrimination. While the case of *EEOC v. Catastrophe Management Solutions* upheld the precedent that hairstyles are a mutable characteristic, and institutional prohibitions of certain styles are not actionable instances of racial discrimination; if the application and interpretation of facially neutral policies are based upon stereotypes about Black Americans and their hair, then they are racially prejudicial.

There are at least two possible solutions to redress the American epistemological asymmetry regarding Black hair and the pernicious consequences of the discourse of manageability. First, explicit laws are required to denounce and discontinue the enforcement of policies that categorically prohibit Black hairstyles. A number of states have already taken up this mantle.

In July of 2019, Governor Gavin Newsom of California signed a bill that expands the legal definition of “race” to include “traits historically associated with race, including, but not limited to, hair texture and protective hairstyles”; State Senator Holly Mitchell of Los Angeles introduced the bill, known as the Crown Act—an acronym for “Create a Respectful and Open Workplace for Natural Hair” (Stack 2019). Since then, twenty-two other states have introduced the bill, with New York and New Jersey already signing it into law.

The second strategy involves the rigorous public education of Americans on the nature of Black hair. The discourse of manageability betrays a profound ignorance of the presentation options and the care and maintenance requirements of kinky and curly hair. If more information were commonly available, school authorities and hiring managers could not persist in good faith with prejudicial interpretations of facially neutral policies. Afros are distracting only in the eyes of those who rarely see long kinky hair. Cornrows and braids, two of the most common protective styles, will be appreciated for what they are, that is, ways of containing long, curly hair that minimize breakage and entanglement. Locs are only categorically messy in the minds of those who do not know what the maintenance of locs entails. Locking kinky hair is one effective management strategy for long hair; coincidentally, since locs are a style that renders kinky hair relatively heavy, locs “fall,” facilitating further styling consistent with the idioms and metaphors of straight hair. Otherwise, the general knowledge that the spatial metaphors that describe long straight hair do not apply as readily to curly or kinky hair will facilitate greater acceptance of more creative and idiosyncratic Black hairstyles. Applying straight-haired spatial metaphors and care knowledge to kinky hair contributes to social misunderstandings, and discriminatory practices when codified as institutional policies.

There are, of course, a number of cultural and professional spaces where there is a great deal of knowledge concerning the care and presentation of Black hair, notably Black barber-shops and Black hair salons. In a number of states, stylists must acquire a special license in order to work on “natural Black hair.” For instance, the New York Division of Licensing Services notes, “Techniques which result in tension on hair roots such as certain types of braiding, weaving, wrapping, locking and extending of the hair *may only be performed by a natural hair styling or cosmetology licensee* who has successfully completed an approved course of study in such techniques” (Appearance Enhancement 2018, §400). The motivations for licensing are twofold: economics and liability. In terms of economics, a special license ensures that Black “cosmetologists” who simply braid hair in their living rooms will pay taxes. Regarding liability, a license is an institutional indicator of competence (Lee 2008). Caring for kinky or curly hair certainly requires specialized knowledge, and special licensing ensures that cosmetologists have that knowledge. In New York, at least, one does not need to study cosmetology per se in order to style natural black hair, since doing so requires a separate license altogether. It is curious, however, that “cosmetology” implicitly concerns straight hair. Any cosmetologist can work on straight hair, but clients with kinky hair require a specialist. Arguably, general cosmetology training should include, by default, the care of kinky and curly hair as well as straight hair.

Racism collapses the black aesthetic into the political; it *makes* individual aesthetic choices political for black people. Rather than mere adornment, racism renders hairstyles presumably transparent indicators of character and credibility. An epistemological frame enables us to appreciate the ways in which our personal hair styling choices are a function of *perceived* manageability, particularly in terms of available time, resources, and knowledge. Reframing this “problem” of Black hair in terms of knowledge/

ignorance enables us to gain purchase on some of the more concrete yet insidious consequences of this dimension of racism.

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Endnotes

¹ Consistent with Johnson's presumption, a recent study suggests that one's apparent "minority sexual orientation" can mitigate racial stereotypes about both Black and white men (Petsko and Bodenhausen 2019).

² In a recent article, Raewyn Connell, the scholar who coined the term "hegemonic masculinity," radically rethinks the scope and meaning of her initial coinage. Contrary to her Connell argues that not all men are capable of achieving, or even aspire to attain, hegemonic forms of masculinity as a function of their maleness. She says, "forms of masculinity have to be re-thought in contexts of informal settlement, mass poverty, or social violence" (Connell 2014, 228). Scholar Tommy Curry extends this insight to argue that Black men in the United States are quintessential non-hegemonic males (Curry 2017).

³ There are many examples: in 2013, Vanessa VanDyke, then twelve years old, was threatened with expulsion from her school, Faith Christian Academy in Orlando Florida, when her afro was deemed a "distraction" in violation of the school dress code (Hobdy 2013). Similarly in 2017, the North Florida Christian School, a private school, told Jenesis Johnson, a junior at the time, that her afro was "inappropriate" for school; the student handbook notes, simply, that "faddish or extreme hairstyles" are prohibited and that the administration will adjudicate any "questionable styles" (Ceron 2017; "NFCS 2016-2017 Student Handbook" 2016, 42). In 2018, a referee forced Andrew Johnson—a wrestler and a junior at Buena Regional High School in New Jersey—to cut his locs or forfeit his match; the referee determined that Johnson's hair needed to be either covered or cut, since his "*natural*" hair—meaning, "un-styled" hair, i.e. un-loc'd—would allegedly "extends below the earlobe on the sides or touches the top of a normal shirt" and thus violate the hair length policy prescribed by the National Federation of State High School Associations (Press, Associated 2018). Absent an appropriate cover, the wrestler chose to have his hair cut; he subsequently won the match. Following an investigation into the matter, the Division of Civil Rights identified a pattern of interpreting "the [hair length] rule to apply to various traditionally black hair styles regardless of length" (Press, Associated 2019). Various antidiscrimination efforts are being implemented as a result, and the referee, Alan Maloney, now faces a two year suspension (Evans 2019; Stanmyre 2019). In 2019, at Berry Miller Junior High School, in Pearland, Texas, Juelz Trice, a seventh grader, was compelled to use a sharpie to fill in a "design line" that a barber had cut into his low cut hair, allegedly because it violated the school dress code, requiring hair to be "clean, neat, and well-groomed" ("PISD 2019-2020 list. Handbook" 2019, 86); his parents are suing the school district for racial discrimination and other harms (Fieldstadt 2019; Scott and Benito 2019).

⁴ Two anecdotes: in 2016, managers at a Zara Clothing store in Toronto characterized an employee's hairstyle—arranged of box braids and gathered into a ponytail—as unclean and unprofessional. Zara claims that while employees are expected to present a professional appearance, this manager's specific characterization of this particular hairstyle does not necessarily reflect company policy (Lee-Shanok 2016). Also a woman in the UK told BCC News that her manager claimed that her afro was unprofessional and advised her to wear a weave to work instead (Sini 2016).

⁵ Justice Sloviter dissented: "[T]he court made the critical finding that the 'no beard policy, while racially neutral on the surface, in fact has a discriminatory impact on Black employees. Black males who are otherwise qualified, are barred from higher paying positions solely because of the condition peculiar to their race'" (Equal Employment Opportunity v. Greyhound Lines 1980, 635:196) Sloviter concludes, "In my view, the evidence introduced by plaintiff in this case was sufficient to support the finding that plaintiff established a prima facie case under Title VII because the evidence showed (1) that Ferguson has a condition which disproportionately affects a protected class of which he is a member; and (2) that this condition precludes him from meeting the employer's facially neutral employment policy [...] Because I am concerned that the majority's opinion imposes unwarranted obstacles to the effective use of the discriminatory impact method of proving a Title VII case, I dissent" (1980, 635:200).

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