

# From About “Me” to About “We”: Therapeutic Intentions of Black American Women’s Natural Hair Blogs

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Psychological support is not confined to therapists’ offices, but also transfers to social media forums for Black American women. Black American women bloggers with natural hair care practices have participated in asynchronous computer-mediated communication, where discussion is based around caring for oneself and one’s hair. There is a dearth of research about the role of the Black American female hair bloggers in setting out therapeutic intentions for their online community. Through investigating the theory of PsychoHairapy (Mangum & Woods, 2011; Mbilishaka, 2018) that argues that hair can be an entry point into psychological interventions, this study investigated therapeutic intentions represented by Black American women on their natural hair blogs. Through a content analysis

of the “About me” section of the top 40 visited natural hair blogs, 4 independent raters identified that 93% of the bloggers represented at least one therapeutic intention. The results suggest that the blogs serve as a forum for informal support group work derived from the bloggers’ own lived experiences, fulfilling dual roles of peer and expert. This study provides evidence that natural hair blogging can integrate formal and informal techniques of health promotion, resulting in promoting psychological support for a population otherwise marginalized.

*Keywords: Black American Women, blogs, hair, natural hair, therapeutic factors*

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**I**ncreasing in numbers since the late 2000s, Black American women have begun to embrace their natural hair texture and blog on the topic of natural hair to document their healthy hair care journeys (Alston & Ellis-Hervey, 2014; Ellington, 2014; Walton & Carter, 2013). Natural hair is hair free from texture altering toxic chemicals (Davis-Sivasothy, 2011). Chemically straightened hair has been a statistical norm for Black American women since enslavement; the process involves placing highly toxic chemicals on the scalp and the hair follicles to achieve a look of long-straight hair (Davis-Sivasothy, 2011). The transition from chemically straightened to natural hair care

is understandably important because it is revealing a shift in the ideals of Black American beauty, from long straight hair to shorter kinkier textures (Byrd & Tharps, 2014).

Unfortunately, many Black American women making this transition to natural hair face rejection from family, romantic partners, and even potential employers (Ellington, 2014). On the journey of reconnecting with one’s own hair texture, many women turn to blogs for advice about hairstyles and for social support (Byrd & Tharps, 2014; Ellington, 2014). Blogs are identified as individually maintained websites consisting of written posts usually displayed in reverse chronological order (Herring, Scheidt, Wright, & Bonus, 2005) and are viewed as tools or spaces that enable bloggers to express themselves in the wider community (Harju et al., 2016; Selvi, 2009; Sintonen, 2012). Further, natural hair blogs are websites that reflect user-generated content on natural hairstyling techniques, products, optimal practices to ensure hair growth, and a variety of other topics as related to self-care (Ellington, 2014; Byrd & Tharps, 2014). These blogs are typically free of charge, making them accessible to anyone with internet access on a phone or a computer, and the time luxury and cognitive ability to read long blog posts.

Online forums archive and accelerate cultural identity development through meaningful transactions for marginalized racial and ethnic groups (Kim & Johnson, 2018). Specifically, Jacobs-Hueys (2006) identified online exchanges between Black American women about hair as a marker of racial and gender identity. Further, social support has a positive impact on mental health and physical health (Cutrona, 1990), and this impact is amplified through online support from computer-mediated support groups for online communities that match on a variety of demographic and cultural variables (Coulson, 2005; Mo & Coulson, 2008; Yeshua-Katz, 2015). Users have the option to create a profile and leave comments on blog posts, which encourages culturally-specific language interaction between users in the Black American online community (Steele, 2016). There is a sense of community and self-love on these natural hair sites, as they are empowering women to embrace their natural beauty and learn how to style the hair without any chemical altering products (Ellington, 2014; Walton & Carter, 2013). Thousands of natural hair blogs have surfaced that are dedicated to teaching Black American women how to best groom their natural hair for the 30% of Black American women who have decided to wear natural hair (Ellis-Hervey et al., 2016). The “about me” section of these natural hair

blogs provides readers with information about the identity of the author and the intentions of the blog.

The fields of behavioral health would benefit from understanding the therapeutic value of blogging for both the blogger and audience as a symbiotic relationship. By creating natural hair blogs to act as an online communal space for Black American women to promote chemical free hair practices, we argue that bloggers act as potential facilitators of support groups on their sites for Black American women that are disrupting the Eurocentric beauty ideal of straight hair. These online communities may mirror the therapeutic factors of group therapy, where the facilitator articulates the intention of the space to be healing. Online communities form around shared interests, give and receive opinions, advice, and other information that is conducive to their online group (Meng, Martinez, Holmstrom, Chung, & Cox, 2017). Support groups work by emphasizing the inherent expertise from group members' own lived experiences with members fulfilling dual roles of peer and expert (Yalom, 1995). If Black American women bloggers give and receive advice through blog postings, they are facilitating their own support group. We investigated whether Black American natural hair bloggers represent therapeutic intentions in describing the purpose of the natural hair blogs.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

To interpret the psychological messaging on social networking sites, social scientists must deconstruct the entangled history and meaning of hair for Black American women. Before African enslavement in the Americas, African women dedicated significant time and energy to the maintenance of their hair in collective group spaces (Byrd & Tharps, 2014). Women could spend hours to days getting their hair groomed in shared spaces with other women. Hair was given so much time because it was symbolic of demographic variables, such as ethnicity, relationship status, spiritual systems, age, and financial capabilities in traditional African society (Byrd & Tharps, 2014). Unfortunately, slavery prevented Black American women from properly grooming their hair, resulting in various scalp diseases and aesthetic disconnection from African cultural systems (Morrow, 1990). After the emancipation of Africans in America, Black American women engaged in hair straightening practices for social mobility and to fit within Eurocentric ideals of beauty of long-straight hair (Morrow, 1990). Black American women passed hot combs of

temperatures exceeding 300 degrees to make their coily hair straightened or used concoctions of lye that could burn the very hair off of their scalps (Byrd & Tharps, 2014). And yet, the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s brought a return of an African aesthetic, as Black American women fought for political freedoms and advancement (Byrd & Tharps, 2014). However, the natural hairstyles of the 1960s and 1970s appeared to be a passing trend, as many Black American women returned to chemical hair straightening. Presently, a natural hair movement has returned and it has been supported through conversations on the Internet. Modern Black American hair culture has been shaped by the Internet and according to Byrd and Tharps (2014, p. 177), “In the early years of the twenty-first century, the Internet proved itself to be the greatest contribution to Black hair since the hot comb.” Natural hair blogs provided a safe space for Black American women in the early 2000s to have direct, informative, and daily conversations about the politically complex and psychological fixation on the topic of Black American hair (Ellington, 2014; Walton & Carter, 2013).

Hair, and conversations about hair, reveal meanings of ideology and racial consciousness of Black American women (Hall, 1995). Due to intergenerational traumas of hair rejection, Black American women need a safe space to process aesthetic traumas and unpack their lived experiences (Mbilishaka, 2018). In American chattel slavery, enslaved African women were forced to engage in labor based on skin tone and hair texture; women with lighter skin and straighter hair engaged in household work while those with darker skin and tightly coiled hair were subjected to manual labor in the fields (Morrow, 1990). Currently, there are intraracial hair traumas for Black American women grounded in anti-Black racism of tightly coiled natural hair that has continued since slavery and infused into hair shaming behaviors that guide the institutions of family, education, employment, and media (see Smith, Mbilishaka, & Kennedy, 2017; Wilson, Mbilishaka, & Lewis, 2018; Neil & Mbilishaka, 2019). It is critical to give voice to the testimonies of Black American women about the racialized and gender-based topic of hair. Since the hair length, texture, and style of hair has a significant relationship to the self-worth of Black American women, Black American women are engaging in conversations online about how to feel more empowered (Ellis-Hervey et al., 2016). Black American women have therefore forged new space and even language online related to hair through blogs. Through the

Internet, Black American women have collectively defined the meaning of natural hair and the stages of natural hair (Ellington, 2014). For example, “the big chop” is a social media term that describes cutting off the chemically straightened portion of hair from the scalp to have chemical free hair (Walton & Carter, 2013). Black American women have created space to have a counter-narrative to the conversations about hair that are created for and by Black American women. As women give and receive advice through blog posting, they are a part of their own online support group that everyone involved benefits from. By creating natural hair blogs to act as an online communal space for women to promote best hair practices, bloggers have acted as facilitators of support groups on their sites.

### **Hair Care and Mental Health Services**

Existing mental health interventions utilize the relationship between hairstylist and client. Hairstylists were highly trusted individuals in African American society by offering hair care services and sound advice (Byrd & Tharps, 2014). Black American hairstylists have historically created “safe space” for Black American women to express cultural and political conversation through the African oral tradition (Gill, 2010). Black American hairstylists engage clients in conversations about best hair grooming techniques, as well as, health care practices (Solomon et al., 2004). Wisenfeld and Weis (1979) created a micro-counseling training program for hairstylists to address various hypothetical emotional support needs of clients. Ashely and Brown (2015) developed Attachment tHAIRapy to address the emotional needs of African American foster care youth, through combining the skills of a cosmetologist and mental health professional. Mbilishaka (2018) argued that mental health professionals should conduct therapy sessions in hair salons with cosmetologists and train hair care professionals in mental health counseling through the concept of PsychoHairapy. PsychoHairapy (Mangum & Woods, 2011; Mbilishaka, 2018) uses hair as an entry point into mental health services, not only in the salon or barbershop setting, but also through social media to have broader reach.

For Black American women, the Black American beauty salon has traditionally been a source of social and emotional support because of the safe space to be groomed and engage in therapeutic discourse (Linnan & Ferguson, 2007; Solomon et al., 2004).

However, with the dwindling use of the Black American beauty salon that primarily focuses on hair straightening, women who do not straighten their hair are looking for the therapeutic community feeling have transferred their conversations to natural hair blogs (Alston & Ellis-Hervey, 2014; Ellington, 2014; Walton & Carter, 2013). Blogs have replicated the Black American beauty salon and barbershop environment to fill in the social need for community gatherings (Steele, 2016). Bloggers are fulfilling the trusting role of natural helpers, like hairstylists. However, little psychological literature and critical analytic studies have investigated the therapeutic discourse of natural hair bloggers.

### **Therapeutic Intentions for Group Facilitators**

Group work disrupts loneliness and isolation, as it provides an opportunity to garner support and advice from like others (Yalom, 1995). And yet, groups require facilitation to reach the goals of support through a skilled facilitator. A skilled group facilitator can foster healthy relationships amongst its members through addressing therapeutic factors (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). Therapeutic factors are variables that advance the process of developing greater self-understanding and life changes through the creation of a culture of cohesion (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). Skilled group facilitators help group members have greater feelings of belonging, improved communication skills, and a sense of connection to others on minor stressors to major mental illness (Bledin et al., 2016). Groups can help members feel “normal” despite facing traumatic experiences because of the power of hearing similar personal narratives (Gross & Shakespeare-Finch, 2013). The group members themselves are the agents of change when the group facilitator is strategic in the utilization of the 11 therapeutic factors identified by Irvin Yalom, the most prominent group therapy theorist (Yalom, 1995). The factors are described as the following: (1) *installation of hope* occurs when the group facilitator creates feelings of optimism, (2) *universality* manifests when the facilitator assists the group members in recognizing they are not isolated in their issues, (3) *imparting information* is focused on educating the group members with information related to their presenting problems, (4) *altruism* takes place when the group members find value in the opportunity to support other group members, (5) *corrective recapitulation* addresses imbalances from early childhood or family issues of rejection, (6) *socializing techniques* amplify group members’

abilities to empathize and strengthen interpersonal skills, (7) *imitative behavior* is centered around group members gaining coping skills by observing others' behaviors, (8) *interpersonal learning* focuses on educating group members on how to develop stronger support systems, (9) *group cohesiveness* provides group members with a sense of belonging and acceptance, (10) *catharsis* promotes the expression of deep emotions, and (11) *existential factors* is facilitated through the identification of coping with the shared human experience (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). We, therefore, see group work and group facilitators as uniquely satisfying gaps in health care because the advice and support of group members is based on overlapping experiences. Connection and cohesion within a group offers group members safety and respect, core elements to truly engage and heal from unique stressful life experiences (Willemsen et al., 2016). These therapeutic factors result in group members having greater tolerance for their own emotional world (Willemsen et al., 2016).

There are minimal cultural differences in the significance of the therapeutic factors across diverse ethnic group members in group therapy; women of color do benefit from the presence of therapeutic factors (Burtenshaw, 1997; Dubin, 1996; Gloria, 1999). The presence of Yalom's therapeutic factors can shape the well-being of formal and informal groups in ways to prevent significant mental illness in community-based settings (McWhirter, Nelson, & Waldo, 2014). The therapeutic factors of installation of hope and universality show to be particularly helpful in preventing relapses in mental illness and addiction (Demirbas, Dogan, & Ilhan, 2012). Group work and group-based therapy offer immediate improvements for members, but also have long-term benefits when therapeutic factors are present (Lane & Viney, 2005).

Online support groups have emerged in the field of telehealth where therapeutic factors remain relevant and present through online formats (Weinberg, 1995; Turner, Grube & Meyers, 2001). The existing literature on asynchronous online group therapy found that 9 of the 11 Yalom's therapeutic factors were represented in the online format (Diefenbeck, Klemm, & Hayes, 2014). In the Diefenbeck et al. (2014) study, participants in an online support group processed their well-being as being the primary care givers to someone with a chronic disease. The group was online and peer-led, where the facilitators were group members that had shared experiences of being care givers.

Several therapeutic factors were identified through a qualitative content analysis and the study revealed that group cohesiveness, catharsis, and imparting information were the most frequent (Diefenbeck et al., 2014).

This research study aimed to examine the content of Black American natural hair blogs “About me” section to assess the therapeutic intent of the bloggers for their readers. Qualitative research may be useful to archive the language of Black American natural hair bloggers when introducing themselves and the purpose of their blogs. There is a dearth of research on intention setting of these blogs and concepts of support. Here, we are defining therapeutic intention setting as a means of providing cognitive or emotional support to a group (see Yalom, 1995). The investigation was grounded in extending research on computer-mediated support for Black American women through hair care.

## **METHODS**

This research study employed a content analysis of Black American natural hair blogs. Inductive reasoning and comparative analysis served the purpose of exploratory analysis to build future theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Here, we examined what the bloggers wrote, but also interpreted the intent in the “About me” section of their blogs as a means of introduction and setting the emotional tone of their natural hair blog. Researchers viewed the “About me” sections of the natural hair blogs as they offered the bloggers an opportunity to share their personal narratives of why they started the natural hair blog and give specific details about their natural hair journeys.

This content analysis was centered on the information communicated by Black American natural hair bloggers to their Internet-based communities. To examine the therapeutic intent of bloggers, researchers conducted an analysis of the “About me” section of the most frequented natural hair blogs. Researchers archived the “About me” section at one data collection point, as this section is not the focus of daily updates, but stable enough to explain the biographical sketch of the blogger and explain the purpose and intent of the blog. Researchers used the online search engine of Google to compile a list of the top 40 blogs visited on natural hair (see Table 1). Inclusion selection for the sample of natural hair blogs was: at least one of the authors were self-identified as a Black American woman or oriented for the Black American community, and no explicit hair product

promotion funded site. Bloggers did not need to give consent, as the blogs were identified as public domain did not undergo any manipulation during the research process.

Table 1 *Blog Name and Authorship*

Blog Name	Authorship
Black Girl With Long Hair	Leila Noelliste
Curly Nikki	Nikki Walton
Natural Hair Rules	Tamara Floyd
Black Naps	Ariane
Confession of a Blog Vixen	West
Natural85	Whitney White
Natural Beautiful Hair Blog	Karen
Mo Knows Hair	Monica Stevens
Coily Hair	undisclosed
Afrobella	Patrice Grell Yursik
Sporty Afros	Whitney Patterson
Holistic Locs	Tera
Natural Hair Everything	Melshary
Curl Centric	Kenneth and Kira Byrd
K is for Kinky	undisclosed
Naija Can Grow Hair	Dabs
Glam Natural Life	Shelly
Kinky Coily Me	Jenell Stewart
Care for Your Hair	undisclosed
Veepeejay	Vashti
Good Hair Diaries	Kavuli
Strawberri Curls	Gabrielle
Lola Curls	Lola
Our Natural Kids	undisclosed
Black Hair Media	Nicolle Epps
Meechy Monroe	Tameka Moore
Urban Bush Babies	Nikisha Brunson and Cipriana Quann
Going Natural	Mireille Liong
Conscious Coils	Amber Starks
Miss Rizos	Carolina Contreras and Nikol Ramírez
Natural Hair Does Care	Shalleen and Seanna Kaye
Unruly	Antonia Opiah, Chadette Maragh, Remi Powell
Thirsty Roots	Sharina Hall
Hairscapades	Shelli
Hairspiration Blogspot	undisclosed
Black Hair Kitchen	undisclosed
Textured Talk	Charlene Walton
My Natural Sistas	India, Toni, Carmen
Black Hair Information	undisclosed
Natural Sisters	Ruth Mafupa

The data from the “About me” sections of the natural hair blogs were organized into word document files that were copied and pasted verbatim with the weblink and date. All of the “About me” sections were reviewed three times by four independent reviewers (one African American female psychology professor, one African American psychology graduate student, and two African American female psychology undergraduate students) for initial survey. All coders engaged in a content analysis to infer therapeutic intent from the bloggers’ transcripts (see Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2008). Here, therapeutic intent was interpreted when the blogger described the intent to teach about a hair issue and how to solve it, encouraging others that things will get better in the natural hair journey, blogger provided a feeling of inclusion in a larger group of Black American women with natural hair, and when a blogger described the amount of readers belonging to the forum that are aligned as a collective identity. These intentions are conducive to an online community because they create a sense of unity and support while promoting learning from others. Even further, therapeutic intent was interpreted when bloggers documented about primary family experiences with understanding how hair behavior was shaped by family, the blogger invited readers to mimic another user’s hair behavior, and the bloggers provided techniques on improving social skills by increasing hair interactions with others. The group of independent coders met and reached a .75 inter-rater reliability minimum for the presence or absence of therapeutic intent in each of the blog posts “About me” section.

## RESULTS

The four independent raters identified that 93% of the bloggers represented therapeutic intent. The blogs were explicitly encouraging and supportive of other women on the natural hair journey. Many of the bloggers used language like a coach or therapist and explained their motivation to help others through the natural hair journey. For example, Curlcentric.com wrote:

Be encouraged. Keep making progress during your natural hair journey. You can’t fail until you quit.

CurlyNikki.com included a therapist’s angle in writing the “About me” section. The author, Nikki Walton, articulated that the purpose of the natural hair blog was explicitly for education and therapeutic value. For example, Nikki writes:

CurlyNikki.com was created to serve as an online ‘hair therapy session’ for those struggling to embrace their naturally curly hair. It not only serves as an educational tool, but as a platform for each of you to share your experiences, frustrations, and triumphs of being Naturally Glamorous.

These sentences in the “About me” section offers the blog readers an opportunity to be invited into the blog to learn, be emotionally expressive, and to feel embraced.

When negotiating the psycho-aesthetic changes of transitioning from chemically straightened to natural hair, many Black American women may feel isolated in addressing the process (Ellington, 2014). Many blogs identified the number of people that used their website to address issues related to natural hair. For example, Black American Girl Long Hair shared the amount of traffic on the website to be in the millions and thousands of registered members for Black American women going natural. Black Girl Long Hair clearly denoted who was included in the community of women, both Black American and bi-racial, being members of this group being they “choose” to be natural, by stating:

Black Girl with Long Hair is a website dedicated to the ever-growing community of Black and bi-racial women who choose to wear their hair naturally — with no use of chemicals and minimal use of heat, weave or extensions.

The bloggers consistently used the “About me” section to create space for Black American women in the digital world to collaborate. Blackhairmedia.com shared a philosophical stance on utilization of the online environment for Black American women:

We believe Black women should have an online social environment in which to discuss and share ideas about the best practices for hair, beauty, and skin care, as well as utilize the site as a resource for finding information on these topics.

The authors of this blog encouraged the exchange of conversation and information in a space that was explicitly for Black American women.

Most websites encouraged readers to be hopeful about the natural hair journey. Naturalhairrules.com invites readers to not only learn about natural hair but to get “inspiration” from using the website in the processes associated with natural hair:

Natural Hair Rules offers natural hair care info, hairstyle guides, and inspiration.

This site is dedicated to encouraging others to be who they are naturally.

Additionally, Blacknaps.org shared the purpose of her natural hair blog to focus on hope

by being optimistic about having a healthy hair journey by reading the blog:

I hope you enjoy reading this blog as much as I enjoy writing it. Whether your goal is to grow longer natural hair or just to optimize your hair’s health I hope you are able to take this information and customize it to your journey.

Other therapeutic intent emerged as bloggers modeled their process of transitioning from chemically straightened to natural hair. For example, some bloggers gave specific dates of cutting their hair or even shared how they decided to document their natural hair journey through blog entries for helpful purposes. Kinkcoilyme.com stated:

Jenell decided to embrace her natural hair, by way of the big chop, on March 26, 2010. Impulsive by nature, Jenell didn’t bother with transitioning but instead, immediately became fully natural. As she embraced her natural hair, Jenell found joy in blogging about her journey. She created KinkyCurlyCoilyMe! as a way to track her journey and share it with others. Within the first two years of blogging, Jenell transitioned her blog into a natural hair care website for women in need of hair education and support.

Similarly, Natural85.com identified the altruistic nature and importance of blogging on natural hair. She explained:

Every time someone commented on a video letting me know that it had helped them, it just fueled my fire to keep going; it just felt good to help!

Natural hair bloggers also framed their “About me” sections of their blog about negotiating past experiences with their families, and their initial negative reactions to addressing hair care. Moknowshair.com explained:

My first memories of hair styling are of me cutting and curling my dolls’ hair. My mother was not too thrilled about me essentially ruining these toys she’d spent her hard-earned money to buy for me, but she let me do it, and I’m so glad she did.

Although infrequent, socializing techniques were represented by Curlcentric.com, where the blogger gave readers directions on how to interact with other readers:

We also encourage you to leave comments on articles and respond to comments and questions from other naturals.

Although written in a range of perspectives and from the lens of diverse natural hair journeys, the natural hair bloggers represented both information and created communities of encouragement.

## DISCUSSION

Natural hair bloggers content extends the discourse of hair and resilience. With about 30% of Black American women choosing to wear natural hair (Davis-Sivasothy, 2011), the blogs “About me” section can introduce the imparting of information, promote hopefulness, removal of isolation, and condition group cohesion for this neglected population. This shift to Internet-based styling and support spaces represents a cultural shift and generational expansion to connect larger groups of women than one Black American beauty shop would allow (see Alston & Ellis-Hervey, 2014). While Black American beauty salons still hold their cultural-historical role, the beauty culture of the Internet still connects Black American women to their physical and cultural roots (Alston & Ellis-Hervey, 2014). The platform of natural hair bloggers is not responsible for singularly shaping the natural hair discourse, but they are offering their personal narratives to make a connection to their audience. Although there are distinctions between orality and written communication, there is still an aspect of storytelling through the blogs. It is apparent that natural hair blogs promote digital storytelling about the culturally stressful and meaningful topic of hair for Black American women (Alston & Ellis-Hervey, 2014). Black American women transitioning from chemically straightened hair to natural hair can spend over four hours a week communicating about hair on social networking sites getting support and advice (Ellington, 2014). Black American women trust the natural hair bloggers and even report higher levels of self-worth from using the social networking sites (Ellington 2014). These therapeutic factors may be the key element for engagement.

This dataset provides content about natural hair blogs, and if expanded, could relate to future psychotherapeutic value. Extension of the research on the asynchronous participation of readers could contribute to the theory of PsychoHairapy (Mangum & Woods, 2011) that argues that hair can be an entry point into psychological interventions. Because natural hair blogs have a predominately Black American base, they are an ideal

space for mental health intervention as Black Americans do not typically seek out therapy due to issues such as stigma, lack of accessibility, and distrust of mental health providers (see Parham, 2002). PsychoHairapy (Mangum & Woods, 2011; Mbilishaka, 2018) brings psychological wellness to the front of the minds of Black American people, meeting them at a place of familiarity and cultural relevance. The results of this study contribute to the groundwork supporting the potential benefit of peer-to-peer systems, such as natural hair blogs. The data provide potential for building future psychosocial datasets for the unique psyches of Black American women in the form of Yalom’s (1995) Therapeutic Factors. Natural hair bloggers are experts in their own realm, and this free and convenient format of support could one day transition into informal online therapy. It is clear that natural hair bloggers aim to be helpful and this research study is extremely important for the future planning of existing and new websites. Further research would ideally create a protocol to analyze the discussion/comment sections on the natural hair blog posts to investigate if Yalom’s (1995) Therapeutic Factors can be found in the interaction between users. The lack of this information is noted as a limitation. Future studies that analyze data from the comment sections, outside of the intention of the blogs.

### **Implications and Conclusions**

The data we have collected suggests that natural hair bloggers intend to host forums for learning hair care, as well as engaging in emotional processing. In an effort to expand on the facilitation of the embedded therapeutic values, it is recommended that natural hair bloggers create a space in the “About me” section on their sites that invites users to discuss topics of health. The online platform will create a sense of community for users where they can control how much of their information is shared and they are able to seek support without having to feel embarrassed or fear social rejection from their families and peers (Rains, 2014). In addition to a space for discussion regarding mental health, it would be beneficial if bloggers listed the contact information to mental health services so that users can access professionals with ease.

Mental health professionals can encourage clients to engage in and observe online blogging as a tool that is informative, expressive, and also inclusive. Blogs offer the opportunity for its users to “journal” or write out their feelings, as well as connect with people that may share their experiences. Research suggests that being a part of a blogging

community with people who have experienced challenges similar to one's own can be therapeutic and confidence-increasing (Minian, Noormohamed, Dragonetti, Maher, Lessels, & Selby, 2016). Professionals in the mental health field must integrate into the blogosphere to access Black American women in a comfortable setting and fashion. Offering a permanent or reoccurring interactive chat service on natural hair blogs would allow for advice to be shared in a way that is informal, yet helpful.

This study advances the literature on social networking sites with evidence of psychological support on natural hair blogs. These findings are important because they contribute to the theory of PsychoHairapy (Mangum & Woods, 2011; Mbilishaka, 2018) that argues that hair can be an entry point into psychological interventions. Because natural hair blogs have a predominately Black American female base, they are an ideal space for mental health intervention as Black Americans don't typically seek out therapy due to issues such as stigma, lack of accessibility, and distrust of mental health providers (Parham, 2002). The results of this study contribute to the groundwork supporting the potential benefit of peer-to-peer systems, such as natural hair blogs, providing ample amounts of psychosocial data for the unique psyches of Black American women in the form of Yalom's therapeutic factors. The study findings are significant to social scientists and natural hair bloggers that can eventually collaborate on natural hair blogs to provide comprehensive emotional support. The prevalent interaction of hair bloggers and blog users have put them in a unique position to impart important information about hair and mental health. Natural hair blogs are practical and innovative support groups. We recommend blogging as a tool of empowerment (Herring, Scheidt, Bonus, & Wright, 2004; Blood, 2002; Stavrositu & Sundar, 2012) and as a means of sustaining an online community of support that can be beneficial for mental health wellness and provide a sense of belonging (Rains & Keating, 2011).

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### **Online Connections**

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