Executive Summary

According to industry statistics, Black women purchase 80% more hair care merchandise than any other ethnic group. We are raised in a society where a picture of what beauty looks like is plaster all over; is that what we are trying to convey or this a disgusted form of self hatred and finding ways to fixed what we seem to see as a flaw. And no one really knows the true darkness behind hair politics.

Women of African descent are the largest number of consumers in the hair market. Not only in retrospect of hair care but also one of the biggest consumers in purchasing hair extensions. Having extensions used to be such a huge taboo but today in black culture it’s become more common among the race. What exactly does this acceptance of hair alteration mean? Are we all agreeing that our natural hair is not good enough?

The first thing we usually think about when it comes to change is that the previous method was flawed or needed improvement. Looking at this idea from the prospective of hair according to Professional beauty Association approximately 70% of African American women get hair relaxed or has had their hair relaxed. A relaxer is a type of [lotion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lotion) or cream generally used by people with curly-textured hair which makes hair less tangled and also easier to [straighten](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hair_straightening) by chemically "relaxing" the natural curls (Wikipedia: The free encyclopedia). Changing the natural being of our hair can be argued as a form of self hatred then in turn resulting in turning to emulate something you do not have because you value another texture over your own.

This hair crazed world that the black culture surrounds itself around has many sides to it. First in the idea of self worth and embracing yourself to values we have as consumers to a product that has a dark side to it. The hair extension industry has had its fair share of controversy its form of unethical practices to unfair wages given. Evaluating how these two aspects of hair coexist with each other, from unethical and cruel practices to receive virgin hair to African American women making this a part of their lifestyle.

# Introduction

Before looking at the image of hair in the African American women’s mind now in our modern day you have to look into where hair began. It’s ironic that the first self-made black female million made her fortune in the hair industry. Madam CJ Walker created her line of hair products in 1906; there was no hair care industry. You couldn’t just walk into a drug store or beauty supply and pick from dozens of shampoos, ointments, conditioners, sprays and gels. This huge interest in black hair dates back to than era where there was barely any market for it.

The startup of the hair industry began to have people questions and spark interest to what exactly they can do to their hair. In the 1980s weaves came into market and made the black beauty bar higher. The history of hair politics helps investigate the root of this issue but in no way the only factor. Many things play apart to why majority of females of African descent alter their natural hair texture and add extensions. In a piece written Rhonda Jefferies and Devair Jefferies speaks on how from early in an African American girls life they are presented with ideas of hair from stories like Rapunzel to even other fairy tale like Aladdin portray these princesses and African American girls don’t have these forms of role models (Jefferies, 2013).

From what we read to what we see in the media control how we even perceive ourselves. Musical artist like Beyonce and Nicki Minaj gain fame and sex appeal differ from artist like Janelle Monae or India Arie. When we take all of this in we try to emulate and that exactly what is offered in the market, whatever the consumer wants. In a beauty supply store in urban neighborhood you can be sure to find all type of hair products like straightners, heat protectants and even perms. Hair alteration in the black community begins from so young “Just for me” a hair care line for children who offer relaxers for kids ranging in the ages of 5 to 11. Not only are young girls trying to achieve a beauty standard but young man too. My cousin who is 15 years old explained to me how much work it takes for him and his friends go through to achieve “waves”. He explained to me how you have to purchase a certain hair gel and Du rag in order to maintain this. So just as black females got to all types of lengths to alter their hair natural curl pattern males also do the same for different results but the same concept.

The fashion industry holds standard to what is accepted and what is “in”. Pushing all these images of what people should try to achieve doesn’t allow you to embrace the person you are and what you are born with. The fashion industry has very little leading African American innovators from fashion designer or even just in the world of fashion journalism or styling. These people are the driving force in what are the next trends of society.

I haven’t relaxed my hair in two years and a couple of months ago I took out my weave and made a decision that I would go couple of months without any weave. It was an eye opener I really began to realize how uncomfortable I was with my own natural hair versus how comfortable I was with extension. I believe one of our biggest problem with black hair we do not know how to take care of it and what to do. I was so lost the easiest thing to do was a relaxer and why is this cop out?

Well this becomes the easy way to emulate what we are brainwashed to believe that beauty is long and straight while other suffer. Women from other places in the world sacrifice their hair to huge hair company to help with better living condition or even forced! In the industry of virgin hair women, males and children are being exploited. Families whom live in poverty have no choose but to part with their hair to make a living. Virgin hair has gained so much popularity with the new interest in Malaysian and Brazilian hair. Great lengths one of the largest Hair extension vendor has reported that 70% growth over the past five years. So as demand increase, the more conditions for getting this virgin hair get more extreme.

# Analysis

Not only has society accepted this new booming trend of virgin hair, but the market is taking note in the demand for it. According to the most recent census data (2012), the country’s Black population grew by more than 4.2 million people in the past decade. African-American hair product manufacturing will continue to enjoy growth, thanks to a rebounding economy and an expanding Black population with rising disposable income, according to an industry report from IBISWorld, a leading publisher of U.S. industry research. IBISWorld anticipates industry revenue to grow at an average annual rate of 2.8 percent in the next five years, totaling $212.9 million in 2017. In the five years to 2012, industry revenue is expected to grow at an average annual rate of 1.7 percent to $185.1 million (Kilkenny, 2012).

The trend has took a turn with new innovation the extension industry like lace wigs and lace closure, African American women are offered an alter to relaxing their hair. In the past, consumers heavily demanded chemical-based hair products to help relax their hair. Mintel International Group, a consumer spending and market research firm that tracks the Black hair-care industry, says the number of Black women who do not use products to chemically relax or straighten their hair jumped to 36.0 percent in 2011, up from 26.0 percent in 2010. In the same report, Mintel states that sales of relaxer kits dropped 17.0 percent between 2006 and 2011 (Kilkenny, 2012). According to IBIS World notes that in the past five years, many African-American consumers have shifted toward natural hairstyles in which their hair is not chemically altered.

As consumers changed their preferences, less revenue has been derived from sales of chemical relaxers and the demand for other products has increased. The demand for Virgin Hair has drastically increased and the ways of getting this hair for consumer get more extreme. A reporter Homa Khaleeli took a trip to investigate the Human hair industry. She visited small villages and towns in order to see who they are receiving this hair from. There are many stories about the hair trade and how it affects these people lives. Women in these villages live in fear over simply things like hair. A woman was held down by a gang of men in her village just to get her hair shaved off (Khaleeli, 2012). Children are not excluded in this cruel behavior, many children in these villages in China, India and Eastern Europe are being tricked and getting their hair shaved for exchange for toys. Human Trafficking also have been greatly link to virgin hair industry. Women are not only getting sold into prostitution but are getting their hair forcedly shaved (Khaleeli, 2012).

# Conclusion

Women around the world that live in poverty and sell their hair in mean to support their families are getting close to thing for what they grew for free and when it available to consumers they slap on a huge markup price. Even though these women are not getting paid well the prices for extension are getting more expensive. Companies are also coming up with new ideas to keep the industry fresh with lace closure to U- part wigs.

Popularity for human hair has to derive from the fact that synthetic hair is not does not last as long as human hair because it gets quickly damaged by friction and heat. The quality of hair varies greatly. Heating appliances such as curling irons and [straightening combs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Straightening_combs) generally should never be used on most types of synthetic hair. It may never look like human hair, as it can be stiff and move differently than human hair (Wikipedia: The free Encyclopedia). The crave for more realist take on “the look” shoots the popularity for human hair super high. All over social media you see even friends are companies sell virgin hair on Instagram. It’s become so easy to get access to these things. On YouTube you can even see supporter subscribe to beauty gurus who review or have tutorial on long virgin hair as compared to beauty gurus who to a more natural route.

In black culture the tables have turned its now more taboo to be a “natural” then how it used to be. It’s more common to assume a black girl would have a weave but the moment it’s her real hair so many question come with it. As a consumer we should always be aware of what we spend our money on and what practices we support. When being aware of what happens in this hair industry for extension but we still consider ditching what we natural have while other suffer; raises the question. How ethical are we?

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MOVIE

*GoodHair*. Prod. Chris Rock. Perf. Chris Rock. HBO FILMS, 2009. Documentary.