A Phenomenological Study Exploring the Client and Stylist Interaction as A Culturally Specific Form Of Coping With Stress For Black Women in the United States

By
Nicole M. Holden

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

School of Behavioral Sciences
Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA
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APPROVED BY:
Abstract

The purpose of this study is to describe the experience of Black women who visit the salon regularly in the United States. This study is constructed around the culturally intimate relationship of the stylist-client interaction in the Black community as a historical coping mechanism in which Black women utilize for stress and life challenges rather than seek professional mental health services. Although COVID-19 continues to mount a significant mortality rate and financial hardships, its disproportionate effects on communities of color will have lasting implications on their mental health. The need for mental health services has increased due to the mental and emotional toll from the pandemic. To meet this growing need, mental health services are utilizing a variety of platforms and outlets. However, they are not widely available to Black women due to financial constraints, the lack of diversity within the mental health community, and a history of mistrust with the medical community. Many Black women rely on regular social interactions with their stylists to cope. This study explores why some Black women are more comfortable engaging in conversations that may impact their health with their stylist as opposed to Mental Health professionals, the contributing factors of these bonds, and the implications of salon closures on their well-being during the Covid-19 mitigation response.

Keywords: black women, beauty salons, coping, COVID-19, mental health, stress, stylists
Dedication

This manuscript is dedicated to “Elder” Norman Loniel Fulbright, Jr. I wish you could have lived just a little while longer so I could have called you to tell you that I finally finished.
Acknowledgments

First, I would like to acknowledge and thank my husband Tramaine and my daughters, Diamond, Alexis, Saige, and Morgan, who sacrificed as much as I have for me to complete this process. I want to acknowledge my grandchildren Kamryn, Erin, and Graceson, the first generation of children in my family, to be able to proudly rock their natural coils and will never know the trauma of a hot comb or relaxer. I want to thank my uncle Jeffrey, who, ever since I was a little girl until adulthood, made sure to compliment me on how well I did someone’s hair; My brother Jermel and Sister-in-Law Alisha, for laying the foundation for me to open my own business; and my stepmother Sheila for volunteering to be my first client. I am thankful to God for allowing my Grandmother Dessie and my parents Deborah and Rah Rah to have lived long enough to see me make it this far in life and become Dr. Holden; I hope I made you proud. I want to give a special thank you to Jaclyn Claiborne, who read my first draft and told me, “It has body, but it has no soul.” She challenged me, and I would not have finished without her. Thank you to all the volunteers of this study; without you, this would not be possible. I want to thank Dr. Milacci for introducing me to qualitative research; having your class through the pandemic was a blessing. I want to thank Dr. Fred Volk; I could write a whole chapter on how much I appreciate you. Thank you for being my chair and getting me through statistics; I thought it was impossible and would have NEVER stepped up to the challenge without you assuring me that I could make it through. Thank you for failing to reject me. Finally, thank you to my clients for inspiring and supporting me. I just wish the walls of Loc’d ‘N Grace, LLC could talk; it would tell the true story of the client and stylist interaction between black women than I ever could. Thank you, God, for placing all these people in my path.
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Center for Disease Control (CDC)
Central Centrifugal Cicatricial Alopecia (CCCA)
Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)
Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP)
Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
Relational Cultural Theory (RCT)
Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)
Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)
World Health Organization (WHO)

In this study, the term “Black Women” was used to describe women who are: (a) born in the continent of Africa and raised in the United States; (b) women who were born and raised in the United States and are believed to be direct descendants of Black Africans; and (c) women of African descent, who originate from the Caribbean region and are living in the United States. The terms “African American Women” and “Black Women” were used interchangeably to include the diversity that exists within the black community and contributes to the black cultural experiences (Chatters et al., 2009).
Chapter One: Introduction

Overview

There are consequences of untreated psychological distress in Black women that impact the individual and impact their family members and community members. When approaching the subject of addressing the mental health needs of Black women, there should first be an understanding of their history (Mbilshaka, 2018). Hair is an intricate part of the African American community; it is woven into the bonds forged by Black women to represent communication, expression, and freedom. As babies nestle in the wombs of their Black mothers, their mothers daydream about “what type of hair their babies will have.” Stoked in the beliefs of old wives’ tales and superstitions, expectant mothers and supportive family members use the amount of heartburn expectant mothers experience to gauge the amounts of hair their babies may be born with. This is a major indicator of how attractive their babies may be, based on some standards of the Black community. Upon entering the world, a Black baby girl’s beauty will be judged by the shade of her skin, length, and texture of her hair by those closest to her. Faced with this beauty standard, hair may be the first stressor experienced by Black women. Many young Black girls around the world are taught to be concerned with how their hair looks in the presence of others. Evidence of trauma suffered by the hands of other Black women holding the hot comb, scarring their foreheads, ears, and back of their necks lingers in the far corners of their minds only to be repeated again to their own daughters. This physical trauma is merely an outward reflection on the cyclic internal generational trauma of Black women being judged solely on their appearance. Although painful, the practice of hairstyling is a catharsis for Black women providing some form of escape associated with their hair.
Hairstyles were not only used as an emotional means of escape from abuse and oppression associated with the appearance of Black women, but historically they also served as a literal physical form of escape. During slavery times, slaves were not allowed to read or write; their hair was used as a form of communication. Hair braiders would design roadmaps to freedom using cornrows in the heads of the slaves. This allowed their maps and plans of escape to be hidden from the slave owners and in a secret language that could only be interpreted by the slaves themselves. Seeds were braided in the corn rows adorning the heads of these women in which slave owners found to be resourceful decorations; however, the seeds' true purpose was for slaves to grow their own crops if they ever found their way to freedom (Sharma, 2018).

At some point in time, there was a shift in mindset within the Black community, creating an imbalance with respect to hair by becoming both the oppressors and the liberators. Black women were pressured to alter their natural textures for the sake of appearances, regardless of what it cost them. The phrase “with pain comes beauty” normalized the trauma inflicted on these women through hairstyling practices. Black women who internalized this trauma began taking scalding hot combs to the scalps of their children, stripping young Black girls of their rights to enjoy playing outside or engaging in physical activities for fear of sweating their hair out (O’Brien-Richardson, 2019), and creating a fear of water-- even rain-- because that would reveal the true texture of her natural hair (Versey, 2014).

The oppressiveness of hair and the need to suppress the Black woman’s natural texture evolved from burnt ears and foreheads to burning scalps with chemicals and relaxers to prolong the change in hair texture. This need for societal acceptance led Black women to engage in hair practices that resulted in approximately one-third of black women experiencing Alopecia (Billero & Miteva, 2018), which by definition simply means hair loss but is exacerbated by
traumatic styling practices that cause tension such as braiding or weaving and by thermal and chemical hair straightening techniques (Okoro et al., 2020). This trauma recently led a Black woman in Louisiana to spray Gorilla Glue on her hair just to maintain the slick appearance of a hairstyle before attending a social event, which later had to be surgically removed (Owoseje, 2021). Unfortunately, even celebrities are not immune to this trauma projected by the Black community. Gabby Douglas, a pioneering Olympic Gold medalist gymnast, was ridiculed during the 2012 Olympic Games. Some members of the community took to Twitter to publicly berate her for the way she wore her hair when the focus should have been on her achievements (McElroy, 2015).

Hair is a double-edged sword in the Black community. On the one hand, it is a major form of stress for black women, but it also is a form of self-care to deal with other stressors in their life (Black, 2002). At some point in a Black woman’s journey, a shift occurs whereby the person holding the comb is no longer inflicting trauma. The holder of the comb shifts to being a source of solace as black women confide in them, sharing their accounts of traumatic experiences or events to the listening ear of their stylist, who in some cases may be her most trusted confidant. A therapeutic relationship between the stylist and the Black female client has been forged, indicating that some form of trust has been established between the two, similar to the slave and the braider who braided maps to freedom, where there was a mutual level of trust between them. The slave had to trust the braider to know the path to freedom, and the braider had to trust that the slave would not tell. This research seeks to explore this relationship and establishment of trust between the stylist and Black female client. It is assumed that the trust between these two is generally stronger than the trust Black women have with mental health
professionals, resulting in some Black women utilizing salons more frequently than mental health service providers to achieve a sense of emotional wellbeing and mental freedom.

To capture the essence of the relationship between the stylist and the Black female client, the researcher has chosen to analyze and document the lived experiences of Black women during the salon closures of the COVID 19 mitigation efforts. This period was chosen because it was the first time in history where all the people in the world had time to be still for a moment and reflect. This was also the first time in US history that Black women lost the one liberty they were able to maintain during slavery, which was the freedom to do one another’s hair. Using this lens and timeframe in recent history, this research seeks to understand how Black women were impacted and what coping mechanisms they used without the support of their stylists. This research seeks to understand Black women's experience through their verbal or written accounts and the benefits that the client-stylist relationship may have had on the overall well-being of these women. The researcher will examine why the stylist/client interaction among some Black women is preferred more than seeking professional interventions.

In this chapter, Black women’s backgrounds related to stress are explored: what contributes to their stress; how they typically respond to stress; and the impacts of stress on their everyday well-being. The COVID-19 pandemic and the U.S. mitigation response are included, alongside its effect on the Black community. The distinction between professional and supportive interventions in responding to stress is also examined. Lastly, in this chapter, the introduction to the research questions, definitions of commonly used terms, and summary of the discussion provide the problem statement, purpose statement, and the significance of the study.

Chapter Two delivers an extensive review of the multifaceted literature used to support this study. The literary review includes: (a) contributors to mental health disparities in the Black
community; (b) culturally specific coping mechanisms of Black women; (c) community-based support systems; (d) role of the salon in the black community; (e) health, hair, and the image of black women; (f) role of the stylist; (g) salon-based health education: systems and screenings; and (h) summary.

Chapter Three addresses the methodology that was used for this research and includes the following: (a) an overview of qualitative research; (b) background on phenomenology; (c) the researchers' role; (d) Challenges and researcher biases; (e) procedures such as instrumentation, participants, and settings; (f) Interpretation of the data; (g) and summary.

Chapter four comprises the verbal transcripts of interviews conducted with the participants with a focus on the findings.

Chapter five synthesizes the results and implications this study may have for some Black women.

**Background**

**Freedom Through Hairstyling**

Since slavery, the practice of masking pain under the guise of displaying strength and emotional restriction has been prevalent among women in the African American community. This form of coping contributes to the approaches some Black women take in their help-seeking behaviors (Nelson et al., 2020). Historically, Black women have allowed the views and opinions of others to shape their identities. Continuing for many generations after slaves were freed, the Western standard of beauty has dictated how Black women have worn their hair. However, as America takes steps towards being more racially and culturally accepting of the Black culture, women are exercising more autonomy in how they wear their hair (Thomas, 2013), a freedom that is usually expressed with the assistance of a regular stylist.
The ability to have autonomy in hairstyling practices is significant for Black women. During slavery, styling hair was one of the few privileges slave masters allowed their slaves to exercise as a form of cultural expression (White & White, 1995). Slave owners routinely exercised total control, stripping slaves of their family, native language, and ultimately their identities. However, slaves were given the liberty to maintain one connection to their culture through their hair styling practices (Lawson, 1998). Historically, in many African cultures, hair styling is noted as being an important social ritual that reflects one’s identity (White & White, 1995). The ways in which women wear their hair, whether presented in a minimal or elaborate style, not only represents an aesthetic component, but it also informs and or reflects one's womanhood, special condition, or status (Sieber & Herreman, 2000).

Hairstyling is a deeply rooted cultural practice among those with African origins. The texture of these people’s hair has the unique ability to be configured into forms that display any message the Black woman chooses to convey. This form of visual expression and communication is an integral part of African culture that has managed to survive the bondaged voyage across the Atlantic through many generations, unlike many other cultural traditions that were lost (White & White, 2015). The process of selecting someone to style the hair is a sacred tradition that dates back to West Africa. In West Africa, the person chosen to style a woman’s hair was usually a close friend or relative considered to be an extension of the person receiving hair styling services (Sieber & Herreman, 2000).

Once the slaves were freed, the practice of straightening the kinks out of their hair was adapted to mimic the oppressor’s hair texture; for some Black people, it was a sign and or display of equality. This may have also been done to separate themselves from being compared
to animals by their slave masters as their hair texture resembled sheep's wool. By the dawn of the Civil Rights era and the Black Power Movement in the 1960s, Black women began wearing their natural hair texture to express their freedom from the European assimilation previously adopted (Lawson, 1998).

**COVID-19 Pandemic**

In 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the SARS-CoV-2, a viral respiratory pathogen, most commonly known as the Covid-19, a global pandemic in response to a viral outbreak originating in Wuhan, China (WHO, 2020). Nearly one year after the first cases of Covid-19 reached the U.S. border, there have been more than 27.5 million confirmed cases and more than 495 thousand deaths and counting (JHU, 2021). The primary form of transmission of COVID-19 is through the spread of respiratory droplets of an infected individual who coughs, sneezes, or talks within six feet of another person (CDC, 2020). The virus may also spread by touching contaminated surfaces or objects, then using one’s hands to touch the face, mouth, nose, or eyes of a non-infected person.

**The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Salon Industry**

Under the guidance of the CDC, the United States’ early response to the rapid transmission rates of Covid-19 included the closure of non-essential businesses, services, and schools from March 2020 to May 2020. The hair service industry was directly affected by the closures due to its high volume of service, intimate nature, and the inability to follow social distancing guidelines while rendering and receiving services (CDC, 2020). Hair services were deemed a non-essential industry because of the potential of high rates of transmission.

There are approximately 967,013 hair salon businesses in the United States (Industry Market Research, Reports, and Statistics, 2020). Salons can be found in every community
(Linnan & Ferguson, 2007), with each of these salons servicing approximately 130 clients per week (Beebe et al., 2017). Prior to the salon closures, many women often received services at a salon regularly. The average client visits the salon once at least every 4-8 weeks and spends almost three-quarters of the service time engaging in conversation (Beebe et al., 2017), resulting in the salon closures leaving many women across the United States unable to get their hair done, and disconnected from a major form of socialization.

In the African American community, the amount of time spent at the salon often contributes to establishing bonds between stylists and clients based on trust, loyalty, support, and comfort (Linnan & Ferguson, 2007). This frequent engagement often results in beauty salons being an ideal place for reaching African American women and promoting awareness of health issues (Linnan & Ferguson, 2007). During the COVID-19 pandemic, Black women may have benefited from the salon the most after reporting feelings of confusion, misunderstanding the disease, and mistrust of the information surrounding COVID-19 and its spread (Chandler et al., 2021).

**Stress-related contributions to the Black Women's Vulnerability to COVID-19 Related Morbidity**

The storied history of the Black community, its culture, and its women are the foundation for which the closure of salons may have impacted Black women’s ability to cope with stress induced by the COVID-19 pandemic and the U.S. mitigation efforts. Black women report having high levels of stress due to raising children as single parents with low-income statuses (Broussard et al., 2012), long-term employment, poor or inadequate housing, and higher than average incarceration rates (Greer, 2020). Additionally, Black women are more vulnerable to
race-related stress in part for being both black and female (Greer, 2020), which disproportionately makes them more so affected by psychological challenges (Felix et al., 2019).

Race-related stress is often triggered by negative cultural stereotypes which infiltrate one’s thoughts about self-worth and ethnic identity. The internalization of these attacks compromises the importance of a black woman’s existence, which may trigger symptoms of depression, instances of anger and hostility, and or engaging in risky health behaviors. These have all been linked to high blood pressure and cardiovascular reactivity (Wyatt et al., 2003).

One must recall that black women encounter judgment from birth based on three distinct elements of their identities beyond their control: their race, gender, and appearance. Added to these elements, Black women are more likely to face issues that are not experienced by women of other races and cultures on a larger, more collective scale. Black women work hard to be strong and must exercise resilience as they struggle through oppression, discrimination, and stereotyping. They must work harder to maintain a balance of education, domestic and work-life obligations, and responsibilities, often without the assistance and support of others (Bronder et al., 2014). Black women are expected to be caretakers of their family and community while maintaining a semblance of pride and grace to the very forces that perpetuate this cycle of burden. They are rarely allowed to express their true emotions for fear that they may be perceived as weak or vulnerable (Jones et al., 2020).

Black women must display a certain image of strength that may be contradictory to the weight of all the burdens they carry. This necessitates Black women to always maintain a sense of control, which is most often presented through their image. If Black women allow themselves to become emotional in the presence of others, they are perceived as aggressive, angry, hostile, and loud, resulting in an unfair assessment as the “Angry Black Woman” (Jones & Norwood,
There is the other end of the spectrum, in which Black women must contend with the “Strong Black Woman” stereotype that results from her demonstration of the independent, emotionally restrained, self-sacrificing dynamic perpetuated through generations of emotion- and self-silencing (Jones et al., 2020). This yields the only safe harbor of expression for black women to be their hair, and that has been their sole source of freedom since slavery (White & White, 1995).

The toll of Black women having to appear resilient in the face of stress and crisis has adversely affected their physical health. Black women experience higher rates of obesity, diabetes, and hypertension, increasing their morbidity and mortality rates for almost every illness, compared to members of other racial-gender groups (Walker-Barnes, 2014). These stress-related health disparities exacerbated Black women's susceptibility to COVID-19 related complications and death (Chandler et al., 2021).

**COVID-19 Related Stressors.** The pandemic brought forth additional stressors such as risks of exposure to and transmission of the coronavirus; loss of loved ones, employment, relationships, and social interactions; the inability to obtain necessities, food, and supplies; and most egregious, the infringement on personal freedoms, which all contributed to emotional distress (Pfefferbeaum & North, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent quarantine, physical distancing, and social isolation increased mental illness risk factors. Negative coping skills, such as increased alcohol consumption and online gambling, increased during this time (Moreno et al., 2020). The mental and emotional well-being of all people were and continue to be a major concern as America grapples with achieving some sense of normalcy.

In addition to the day-to-day stress experienced by the Black community, Covid 19 devastated it. Their community experienced COVID-19 related illnesses and deaths
disproportionately to their white counterparts, with approximately 30% of confirmed cases occurring among African Americans, although they comprise only 13% of the U.S. population (Thakur et al., 2020). Many factors contributed to the Black community's higher risks of transmission, infection, and recovery, including underlying comorbidities such as hypertension, diabetes, and obesity, notwithstanding access to care and financial constraints (Yancy, 2020). Additionally, COVID-19 mitigation measures, i.e., social distancing restrictions, toppled the safety net and social structures of the Black community. With higher numbers of infections, families were unable to rely on older relatives and friends for child-care, and older relatives were unable to rely on younger relatives for day-to-day support. Those living in multi-generational homes and unable to adhere to CDC guidelines witnessed the devastating effects of COVID-19 firsthand, as scores of family members and friends died in hospital rooms alone. Others in the community died in isolation. Traditional community outlets of ceremonial grief were often limited or not allowed, creating the inability to properly grieve and receive closure (Moore et al., 2020).

**Professional Vs. Supportive Interventions**

The events surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic created an increase in symptoms of anxiety and depression (Barzilay et al., 2020). The increase in depression may be attributed to the aforementioned stress-related factors but may also be a result of the lack of interaction and perceived social support, which leads to depressive symptomatology (Bronder et al., 2014).

Social support has been proven to increase resilience and can improve women's mental health (Catabay et al., 2019). Some Black women must have some form of social support in their life. Friendships with other females are significant social support sources for Black women (Hall et al., 2012). Other forms of social support including, engaging with extended family or
religious communities, have been shown to soften the blows of general stress responses among Black women (Wyatt et al., 2003). Adult black women spend a majority of their day in the workplace, resulting in many friendships developing in the workplace; however, in a workplace environment, Black women are concerned with how they are perceived. As a result, some Black women cannot completely express their emotions in the workplace (Hall et al., 2012), resulting in a hesitancy of Black women's willingness to express emotions. For this reason, the decision to seek professional interventions to cope with stress in any space where there may be the opportunity to be judged is one that is often met with a bit of resistance.

In the black community, there is a long history of institutional betrayal (Gomez, 2015), resulting in the decision to seek either professional or supportive interventions being based on perceived behavior control; therefore, although psychological distress can be present, seeking mental health services is contingent upon perceived control over the situation (Mesidor & Sly, 2014). Due to the social distancing restrictions during the pandemic, there was limited opportunity to seek both professional and supportive interventions. The ability to connect with others on a social level was incapacitated once stay-at-home orders were in place and in-person therapy visits were restricted. Supportive interventions that promote coping and wellness are sufficient during stressful times (Pfefferbeaum & North, 2020), but supportive interventions were greatly limited. Professional interventions, however, such as mental health services were available to address COVID-19 related stressors, secondary adversities, and psychological effects such as anxiety and depression, were available virtually through tele-help platforms (Pfefferbeaum & North, 2020).

The interaction between the client and stylist was one of the major forms of social support that black women lost during the pandemic. In the African American community, the
amount of time spent at the salon often contributes to establishing bonds between stylists and clients based on trust, loyalty, support, and comfort (Linnan & Ferguson, 2007), resulting in the interaction that takes place at the salon becoming a form of social support for black women (Solomon et al., 2004). This frequent engagement often results in beauty salons being an ideal place for reaching African American women and promoting awareness of health issues (Linnan & Ferguson, 2007). During the COVID-19 pandemic, Black women may have benefited from the salon the most after reporting feelings of confusion, misunderstanding the disease, and mistrust of the information surrounding COVID-19 and its spread (Chandler et al., 2021), especially for the women who are less comfortable with receiving information and seeking interventions from other professionals.

**Situation to Self**

The inspiration to conduct this study comes from my own experience as a small business owner, the interactions I have with my clients, my personal experiences, and my issues related to hair and seeking support for managing stress. I am the owner of a Natural Hair studio called Loc’d ‘N Grace, LLC, located in Towson, MD. I am a certified Natural Hair specialist and certified Trichologist, specializing in working with Black women who wear their natural hair in “locs” and clients identified as having Alopecia. I also own a non-clinical counseling center called Creative OUTLETS for Counseling and Support, which primarily focuses on grief and Pastoral Counseling.

Through my journey of providing hair care services, I learned three things about black women and their hair: (1) many black women use their hair to present the desired image; (2) many Black women are uncomfortable with their natural hair; (3) a woman’s hair tells a story
about her journey. While working with an excess of 100 women on a mostly consistent basis for three years, I have learned that in addition to self-care, many women utilize the time spent getting their hair done as (1) a form of escape from family and responsibilities; (2) a time to vent; (3) and a place to seek clarity for personal issues and/or stressful issues. I believe the biggest lesson I learned on how important hair and the stylist client interaction was to Black women was during the COVID-19 pandemic, which I will discuss a little later.

I believe I would be seriously remiss if I did not share the fact that I am a black woman who has no personal attachment to the stylist client interaction from the perspective of a client. I have always been a person who had the ability to style my own hair, and I preferred it that way. The interactions and experiences from family and friends while growing up brought forth a lot of shame concerning my hair. As a result of this shame, I did my best to maintain total control of my own hair as a form of self-protection. All my earliest memories are somehow associated with my hair. The one that stands out the most is the morning my mother told me she was taking me to the salon to get a Jheri curl. At the age of approximately eight years old, I felt what I now know was mixed emotions. On the one hand, I was excited because prior to this point, I had never had my hair professionally done. I was nervous because I wasn't sure how I would look with it. Ultimately, the thought brought me to hope that this style would make my appearance more acceptable and put an end to the teasing and name-calling. Michael Jackson wore this style, so I assumed this should be a good thing and make people like me because they liked him. I had hoped the Jheri curls would make my hair grow long, and I would be beautiful like Ola Ray, the leading lady in the Thriller video. Instead, I just looked like and was compared to Countess
Vaughn, who played Alexandria on 227, because like her, even with the famed Jheri curl, I was still black and fat with short hair.

Aside from having the Jheri curl, the salon experience stuck out to me the most. The first woman to do my curl was Hispanic. She had very little empathy for what she was about to do, not knowing that her taking scissors to my short little ponytail would be one of the most traumatic experiences of my life. Then there was the burn. No one prepared me for chemical burns that would come because of achieving this style. It was very different from the burns from the hot comb used to straighten out my tightly woven curls or the thermal irons used to curl my little bangs. Those were isolated, quick unexpected sizzles of heat that left a burn mark long after the physical pain subsided, but the burn from that relaxing process of the curl would burn my entire scalp for the entire time that white cream would take to straighten out my hair until it was washed out. It was painful. The process and the memories were painful, but the worst part is that I never achieved my goal of growing my hair, looking better, and being accepted. The best part, however, was when black women did my hair, especially the kitchen beauticians. The setting was intimate. The conversations were personable. Those women did my hair, fed me fried chicken, and made me feel special on the inside, which made my life outside more bearable.

My short-lived experiences with the salon experience and the stylist-client interaction were bittersweet but not enough to keep me committed into adulthood. My need for self-protection far exceeded my need to interact with a stylist. Part of this may have been the trauma; some may have been the shame and fear of judgment; but a lot of it has to do with my introverted nature, which is something that I fight against daily being a stylist. The demands that are placed on me to be available for these women are greater than my level of comfort, but it appeals to my soft spot to create outlets for women to express themselves openly.
Unfortunately, I had to harden my heart during the COVID-19 shutdown. Since I spent a great majority of my time, sometimes 16 hours a day 7 days a week, doing hair in my laundry room, where I started my business, I rarely had a chance to see what was happening in the outside world. I would hear bits and pieces from my clients about this virus that was going around, but I never had the chance to see how serious it was since I did not keep up with the news. My first glimpse to seeing how serious this was coming from a client who asked if I would still be willing to do her hair if the Governor ordered a shutdown. She advised that she just put on her scrubs, acted as though she was going to work, and just came to my hair salon to have her hair done. I laughed at this because it tickled me since we always joked about her not playing about her hair and never missing an appointment; however, when the Governor ordered the shutdown for the first time, I realized that this must be serious, and I immediately closed my business.

As soon as I sent the text notifying my clients that I would be shutting down, per the Governor's orders, the same client contacted me and said, “Well, are you still going to see me?” Absent was the jest that accompanied the question initially. When I responded, “I don’t know yet, I don’t know all that is really going on,” she showed me a side of her I had never seen when she said, “Well, I need to know because I need my hair done.” With her response, I immediately turned cold. For me, it was just hair, and I could not understand why, for the next week following the announcement, I had so many women calling me to see if they could keep their appointments despite the Governor’s orders. It appeared that no one seemed to care about the risk they would be placed on not only themselves but on my family and me by allowing some, or even one of these women, to enter my home during this time.
When the effects of COVID-19 really hit home for me, following the death of one of my oldest friends from New York and me being separated from my closest family and friends. I grew cold to the requests of my clients and completely cut off all communication. The demands and requests for these women to get their hair done during the shutdown angered me. It was just hair, for God's sake, and I didn’t understand why these women were willing to risk their lives over hair. Now in all fairness, my clients do wear their hair in a style that requires regular maintenance, or it can cause them to lose hair, but lost hair did not compare to lost lives; at least it did not, in my opinion. The fact that I completely lost my income did not even measure up to my desire not to lose family members after learning of several other friends who lost their lives over the next several weeks, but it was not until approximately eight weeks later that we were allowed to reopen, that I realized what it was all about.

For the next several weeks, as one by one, my clients sat in my chair, and I heard the countless stories of what life was like for them in isolation. I began to realize that the social interaction, the conversation, the overall engagement were what it was about. It has now been over a year since the pandemic, and for many, coming to get their hair done is still the only reason many of my clients leave their homes. We talk about everything. I even have some women who have expressed the need to seek professional help after the pandemic but shared their reservations about it. Some of these same women tell me that they feel they should be paying me more because they realize that the weight they entered into my suite with has been lifted by the time they leave. Very rarely do my clients ask to look in the mirror before they leave. They feel good on the inside, and that is all that seems to matter to them.

This experience during the COVID-19 pandemic allowed me to see for the first time what the stylist client interaction meant to black women. While I can not necessarily speak on it from
the client's perspective, as a stylist, I believe it has shown me how much this interaction contributes to the well-being of black women. As a black woman, it has shown me how important my role is in being a support to the women in my community. While I was not overly excited about my unexpected role as a hairstylist initially, I have gained an appreciation of my position as I have always wanted to be in the “helping” field. This study is important to me because I wanted to see what the lived experience was for black women during the COVID-19 pandemic when the salons were closed. I wanted to give these women a voice. I hope that on a large scale, this study can bring awareness to black women utilizing the stylist client interaction as a culturally specific form of coping and the impact it has on the wellbeing of Black women.

**Problem Statement**

The effects of the salon closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic were more than just about an inability to receive hair care services; it was about the inability for many Black women to access a form of social support with stress management benefits. There should be an increased awareness and response given to the need to consider one's cultural values and contexts with providing mental health interventions (Giner & Smith, 2006). Mental health services were available through various remote platforms during the mitigation efforts of the COVID-19 pandemic (Moreno et al., 2020) to address stress; however, studies have shown that many barriers still exist, preventing Black women from utilizing traditional mental health services (Lewis-Coles & Constantine, 2006). These barriers include but are not limited to: stigma, poor access to care, and a lack of knowledge and awareness (Ward et al., 2009).

While reviewing the literature, it was discovered that various methods of coping, such as prayer (Ward et al., 2009); and the need for identifying culturally specific forms of coping for African Americans who deal with race-related forms of stress had been studied (Lewis-Coles &
Constantine, 2006). However, there is a gap in the research that explicitly explores utilizing the salons as a culturally specific form of coping with everyday stress for Black Women during the COVID-19 pandemic. The problem is outside of dealing with race-related stress; the salon experience for Black women and the impact of the salon closures is a subject that has not been sufficiently studied. Identifying the lack of literature on the salon experience for Black women sanctioned the need to explore the lived experience of black women during the COVID-19 pandemic when the salons shut down, which was established as the platform for this study.

**Purpose Statement**

Current studies appear to focus more on the potential physical health benefits of utilizing salons to disseminate health-related intervention and awareness (Wilson et al., 2008). However, there is very little research on the mental and emotional benefits (Ohrnberger et al., 2017) and how the client stylist interaction could have contributed to the wellbeing of black women during the COVID-19 pandemic. It should be noted that this study differs from previous studies that explore other culturally specific forms of coping with stress for black women because it focuses on the salon experience as a potentially positive form of coping for Black women. This study adds to previous research exploring the Strong Black Woman Schema and Psychological Distress, which suggested that ongoing research of the SBW schema can benefit from identifying and separating the benefits from the consequences and creating culturally specific forms of healthy behaviors for African American women (Watson-Singleton, 2017). The purpose of this current study adds to this research because the perceived emotional support Black women receive from their stylists is directly linked to a form of self-care, and the benefits it has on Black women as a culturally specific form of coping with stress is worth exploring.
Significance of the Study

The study's importance is recognizing the benefits the salon experience can have on mental and emotional well-being in Black women. Though there is hope that the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak will eventually subside, the health disparities that placed the Black community at such a high risk will still exist. There is an anticipation of a lingering impact of the trauma associated with the pandemic experiences (Yancey, 2020). Health professionals can benefit from utilizing the relationship between stylists and clients to promote wellbeing, both physically and emotionally. Social support and networks can contribute to better health outcomes (Versey, 2014); therefore, this study can promote utilizing the salons to take active measures to facilitate access to information and care. Stylists can help spread the word in the communities by providing information on the common reactions to stress and basic ways to manage stress (Pfefferbeaum and North, 2020) or, at a minimum, make appropriate referrals to health professionals when needed. This study aims to describe the meaning of the stylist and client interaction among black women and understand the benefits of this relationship on their mental and emotional well-being through the accounts of their lived experiences. The hope is to develop a partnership between health professionals and stylists and provide better support services as the pandemic's aftermath is navigated.

Research Questions

Qualitative research seeks to determine the “what,” “why,” and “how” of a phenomenon (Korstjen & Moser, 2017). The research questions in this study are designed to be broad in an
attempt to gather an in-depth description and to allow the participants to provide unexpected findings. The researcher plans to be flexible while seeking responses; therefore, small adjustments may be made by asking additional questions to accommodate the emerging themes developed based on the answers.

Central Research Question

To capture the overall essence of the stylist and client interaction, the interview process began with soliciting a response to a central research question that laid the foundation for the entire study.

RQ1: How do Black women describe the cultural aspects of the salon experience?

Sub Question 1: How do Black women describe their experience with social support?

Sub Question 2: How do Black women describe the overall wellbeing experience of the salon experience?

Sub Question 3: How do Black women describe their experiences when the salons closed during the COVID-19 pandemic?
Definitions

The following definitions are provided to give clarity in the terminology that was used in this study:

1. *African American* – An American who is a descendant of a person who was brought from Africa to America as a slave between the 17th and 19th centuries (Agyemang et al., 2005)

2. *Caribbean Black* – A person of African descent who originates from the Caribbean region (Chatters et al., 2009).

3. *Coping* – The thoughts and behaviors developed to manage internal and external stressors (Algorani & Gupta, 2020).

4. *Hairstylist or Stylist* – A person who cuts or styles hair professionally (Oxford Languages, 2020).

5. *Stressors* – external events or conditions that cause an imbalance to an individuals’ wellbeing (Gundersen et al., 2011).

6. *Wellbeing* – When an individual has a balance of psychological, social, and physical resources to meet their psychological, social, and physical challenges (Dodge et al., 2012).
Summary

“Hair. It may seem like a mundane subject, but it has profound implications for how African American women experience the world” (Jacobs-Huey, 2006, p.3). The COVID-19 pandemic brought on many concerns for the whole world. Concerns about health, finances and freedoms had an impact on the entire world. Yet somehow, issues of race still rose to the top with concerns surrounding the disparities of this disease affecting the African American community at a disproportionate rate. Through all of this, many black women still had one pressing concern, their hair. For some, those who regularly do their own hair, this was not necessarily the concern, but for the women who regularly go to a stylist, the salon closures had an impact on their experience and possibly their wellbeing. This chapter provided a brief overview of the history of hair as both a point of stress for black women and a stress reliever and how there has always been a connection between hair and freedom for black women, and trust that must be established between black women and the person who styles her hair. This chapter introduced the salon as a support source for black women and the salon experience's significance as a culturally specific form of coping with stress. The chapter also explored the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and how the high rates of risk factors in the black communities affected this population at a disproportionate rate, subsequently compounding the stress Black women already face. This chapter identified the problem, which in summary, is the lack of research on the contributions the salon experience has on the well-being of black women. This chapter also identified the purpose, which is to identify if the salon experience is utilized as a culturally specific form of coping with stress for Black women.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Overview

This literature review provides descriptions of current research and begins with a theoretical framework. This review includes insight into how Black women have been groomed to allow their hair to influence their decision-making, an action that has become an outlet of expression for control. The review delves further into the relationship between the Black woman and her stylist, as her stylist is usually the one person most privy to her vulnerability. Lastly, the review explores historical practices that have led to the reluctance of Black women to engage with the medical community. The literature review provides a foundation for the study by describing previous studies that have been conducted regarding the intergenerational connections black women establish through physical touch and conversations (Mbilshaka et al., 2019; Parmer et al., 2004); the need for black women to present an image of strength through emotional suppression (Woods-Giscombé, 2010); an introduction to the salon experience (Anderson et al., 2010; Hanson, 2019); and the utilization of salons to promote health education and screenings (Browne, 2006; Linnan et al., 2012). In addition to the review and the theoretical framework, this chapter provides additional literature addressing the personas of Black women, their stressors, and their coping mechanisms. Supportive interaction is discussed later in the chapter as it is preferred over professional interventions and is supported by the theory of planned behavior. This chapter demonstrates a gap in the research related to utilizing the salon to cope and the factors that contribute to the bonds established by stylists and their clients.
Theoretical Framework

The following theories helped shape this research: Relational Cultural Theory (RCT) and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and provided the theoretical lens that helped the researcher focus attention on specific aspects of the literature (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). The researcher also utilizes two new perspectives to guide their theory development, "PsychoHairapy" and "Attachment tHairapy." These two methodologies help support the notion of a future partnership between haircare and mental healthcare to provide a more culturally specific form of coping with stress for Black women. “PsychoHairapy” is pairing hair care professionals and mental health professionals to address mental and spiritual health needs through hair care by training the hair care professional with basic counseling techniques (Mbilishaka, 2018). “Attachment tHAIRapy” utilizes hair care as the vehicle leading to an understanding of culture and promoting attachment in a therapeutic context for Black foster youth (Ashley & Brown, 2015). After reviewing these new concepts, along with the RCT and the TPB, this study was guided by the understanding that black women prefer to speak with their stylist as a form of coping with stress as opposed to speaking with a mental health professional based on their need to connect culturally and their attitudes towards mental health.

Relational Cultural Theory

In 1976, Baker-Miller first introduced a view of human development that suggests that people have a yearning for connection through relationships that are created through mutual empathy and empowerment, relationships which allow a person to be open and expressive, thus producing growth through mutual respect (Jordan & Hartling, 2008). As a result of Baker-Miller's ongoing research on the topic, the Relational Cultural Theory evolved, which is one of the key concepts related to the needs of belonging for all women (Haskings & Appling, 2017).
Women in the Black community, especially those who are considered low-income and who are dealing with predictable stressors in their lives, do not always have a support system consisting of family and friends that is mutually beneficial (Copeland & Snyder, 2011). There are mental health professionals (e.g., social workers) available who can help Black women identify their challenges; however, due to the barriers associated with seeking professional support such as the related stigmas, fear of judgment, labeling, and the mistrust of institutions and medical professionals due to institutional betrayal, the need to develop a more culturally accepted strategy is not realized. Creating culturally acceptable forms of support may help Black women feel more comfortable discussing their challenges, finding healthy forms of coping, and seeking professional services when needed (Copeland & Snyder, 2011). Whether black women are receiving support from those closest to them or through an experienced provider, they need to express themselves and acknowledge their experiences; otherwise, they may be reluctant to share of themselves out of fear of being rejected and isolated, which is known as the central relational paradox within the Relational Cultural Theory (Jordan et al., 2008)

**Theory of Planned Behavior**

The Theory of Planned Behavior, self-stigma, and the aforementioned perceived barriers can be used to explain the help-seeking behaviors of African American women, especially for those at risk of anxiety or depression (Damgahanian & Alijananzadeh, 2018). The Theory of Planned Behavior was developed as an addition to Fishbein and Ajzen’s Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA). The TRA suggests that a person’s attitude towards participating in a particular behavior is based on expected outcomes and dictates the motivation to perform the behavior based on this attitude (Mesidor & Sly, 2014). The newer concept was expanded by Icek Ajzen,
who added perceived behavioral control to the original theory. If a person believes they can control the outcome, they are more likely to engage in the activity (Ajzen, 1991).

Ajzens’ research suggested there is a continuum that extends between having total control and having a total lack of control, and somewhere along that continuum lies a persons’ behavior. As long as a person can exercise a behavior without practical constraints, they are thought to have total control; however, if the behavior requires any form of lack of opportunity, resources, or skills, they are believed to have no control. This lack that contributes to a loss of control can be either real or perceived. Azjen noted this addition and developed the concept of perceived behavioral control; this element is the difference between the theory of reasoned action and the theory of planned behavior (Godin & Kok, 1996).

Black women's attitudes surrounding hair are centered on control. Perceived behavior control can directly influence both intention and behaviors (Godin & Kok, 1996). The attitude women have towards their hair, styling preferences, and the decision to regularly attend the salon are all predictors of their behavior (Thompson, 2008). Black women will base a hairstyle choice around the potential outcome of a job opportunity or career advancement (e.g., natural hair vs. relaxed hair). If a woman believes that a particular style will limit her career advancement opportunities, she will forgo getting that style. On the other end of the spectrum, when a woman bases her decision to go to the salon on her opportunity to change her life based on her resources, she has made the decision based on perceived behavioral control.

Attitude is the strongest predictor of the intention to seek mental health services (Bohon et al., 2016). When considering if the salon is used as a culturally accepted form of coping with stress for Black women, it is best to determine their attitudes and beliefs about the salon experience and their attitudes and beliefs surrounding mental health. A person's attitude about a particular
behavior can influence the persons' intention to seek services; therefore, a Black women's attitude regarding mental health can directly affect their intentions on seeking professional mental health treatment or merely going to the salon (Bohon et al., 2016). Having the attitude that going to the salon will produce the outcome of leaving there looking better and feeling better represents engaging in the behavior based on perceived control. On the other hand, basing the decision of whether to seek professional help based on overall beliefs about mental health treatment will control their behaviors and may hinder seeking treatment.

**Related Literature**

**Health, Hair, and the Image of Black Women**

There is a significant connection between health (mental and physical), hair, and image among Black women. As young girls, African American women begin to equate their hair with self-image. Length and texture are the primary components that dictate whether a young African American girl will be pleased with her hair (Pope et al., 2014). The commitment it will take Black women to achieve hairstyles that represent the image that they want to portray will ultimately play a significant role in the decisions Black Women make, even when their health depends on it (Versey, 2014). Starting at a young age, African American girls will decide to sacrifice physical activities over their hair (Pope et al., 2014). The fear of “sweating out a hairstyle” is the most frequently reported barrier of why Black women avoid physical activity (Huebschman et al., 2016) and is just one small area where black women use their hair to exercise control. During their developmental stages, girls are taught to be influenced by others' perceptions, which causes them to invest in projecting a socially acceptable image (O-Brien-Richardson, 2019).
The image of beauty in the western world dates back to Biblical times. In the Bible, 1 Corinthians 11:14-15 sets a precedence for a more Eurocentric ideal of beauty when it says: “Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering” (New International Version). For this reason, mothers in the Black communities have taught their daughters to hide their hair in shame if it did not meet a specific standard, including length (Lester, 2000). Young females are taught at a young age that their natural African hair is unacceptable when their mothers alter the texture of their hair by using a chemical relaxer (Oyedemi, 2016). Many Black women change their hair because this was instilled in them when they were younger (Bellinger, 2007). These lessons and behaviors often carry into adulthood and often contribute to the relationship women have with their hair, stylist, and commitment to the salon.

Social background and position are often interpreted by women's hairstyles (Nyamnjoh & Fuh, 2014). The upkeep of certain hairstyles, primarily those that are more Eurocentric, tends to promote a more professional image. In contrast, more Afrocentric hairstyles may portray a more dominant image of the female (Opie & Phillips, 2015). It is believed that members of minority groups devote a lot of time, money, and energy to “looking White” in the belief that it will reap some form of social and financial benefits (Rudman & McLean, 2016).

Another area concerning hair, health, and image among Black women is how Black women believe they would be perceived if they were to open up about their life challenges with a professional. There is a perceived fear that opening and expressing any form of stress or challenges may result in being labeled, placed on medication, or being hospitalized (Copeland & Snyder, 2011). As a result, the alternative of speaking with a stylist may be perceived as the
safest option when available. For the women who do not frequent a salon, they tend to find alternative methods of support. Black women, especially those who wear their hair naturally, tend to connect with other women who also wear their hair naturally and identify with the associated challenges. This is often experienced by women who frequent social networking sites as a support system (Ellington, 2015).

**The History of Black Women and their Hairstyling Practices**

Hair is considered a powerful tool for self-esteem and empowerment when women can make their own decisions about their hair (Mbilshaka, 2018). Therefore, to get started on the journey of a real understanding of oneself, Black women should begin by researching their history (Randle, 2015). The relationship between stylists and clients may be unintentional by design but fostered by history and culture. The Black woman’s dedication and commitment to the salon experience may directly reflect the intergenerational connections made through physical touch and conversations during childhood (Mbilshaka et al., 2019). These connections over hairstyling can be good or bad. Some of the poor self-images black women have of themselves are likely to have experienced the negative impact of psychological oppression from other family members (Parmer et al., 2004).

**Alopecia**

The pressure of having to maintain a particular image, to the point of limiting physical activity or avoiding exercise, which can have health side effects, can cause black women (Gathers & Mahan, 2014) to be in the form of bondage due to their hair. Stylists have the opportunity to see women in a way many others don’t; they see these women undone. The need to appear well put together both physically and emotionally can be taxing, resulting in self-silencing, and resulting symptoms of depression (Abrams et al., 2019). In addition to the
psychological impact, these hair care practices often result in black women displaying a physical manifestation of stress through Alopecia.

The issues Black women face regarding hair are not centered just on styling and image. A common complaint among African American women includes hair breakage, scalp itch, excessive dandruff, and hair loss, which ranks number four in African Americans' common diagnosis by a Dermatologist. One common form of alopecia is Central Centrifugal Cicatricial Alopecia (CCCA), a form of scarring alopecia that can affect the quality of life for those who are affected. Although dermatologists specialize in skin and scalp issues, African American clients are often dissatisfied with their physicians when discussing these concerns (Gathers & Mahan, 2014). This is partially due to a lack of understanding of black women's unique cultural practices (Gathers & Mahan, 2014). As a result, Linnan et al. (2014) recommended that patients experiencing alopecia seek assistance within their hair care community for education and identification of scarring alopecia. Although there is no treatment for CCCA, early intervention from a stylist can help hair preservation and quality of life concerns (Dlova et al., 2017). The downside to referring these women to stylists, is that their background can limit the type of assistance they can receive from a medical aspect; therefore, it is the relationship between the stylist and the client and the frequency of their interaction that will be used to help assist the client with the onset of the hair loss (Veerabagu et al., 2021)

**Black Superwoman Phenomenon**

When addressing the mental and emotional benefits of the salon experience, and the stylist/client interaction as a form of coping in the lives of Black women, it is essential to understand how these women identify themselves and how they like to portray, or believe they are expected to represent themselves to others. It is necessary to understand this role to better
understand the impact stress has on the mental and emotional health of Black women's lives (Woods-Giscombé, 2010) and how the salon experience helps them cope.

Black women often take on the role of a “Superwoman.” The role of the Black Superwoman is defined as:

A multidimensional phenomenon with encompassing characteristics such as an obligation to manifest strength, emotional suppression, resistance to vulnerability and dependence, determination to succeed, and obligation to help others. This role involves sociohistorical and personal contextual factors as well as themes of survival and health status (Woods-Giscombé’, 2010, p. 41).

**Hair: A Black Superwoman’s Cape.** In accordance with the Black Superwoman phenomenon, it is expected for black women to be caretakers and carry the burden of responsibility for their family and community, yet they are denied the freedom to be emotionally transparent and expressive (Avent Harris, 2019). For many black women, their release of expression comes in the form of hairstyles. Superman has his cape, but the Black woman has her crown (and glory), a term often used to reference Black women’s hair (Teteh et al., 2017). Without a cape, Superman was merely Clark Kent, but when he came out of the phonebooth, his appearance alone made him appear like he could handle all the challenges of the world and prepared him to battle any enemy that came his way. For Black women, the salon is like the phone booth. The transformation that takes place for Black women in the salon gives her the strength and appearance to address life's challenges. Still, there is also a transformation that occurs on the inside as well through conversation and engagement.

The association of Black women and their hair with Superman and his cape is not far-fetched. Children themselves tend to engage in what conflict play, which for the sake of this
research, is being used to illustrate the challenges with conflict many Black women are faced in their everyday lives. This conflict among children often includes emulating superheroes unbeknownst to those around, maybe for deeper reasons other than merely engaging in child’s play. The most common reasons for conflict play comprise: (a) sharing experiences and being socially involved with others; (b) the symbolization and expression of self-actualization and overcoming causes of potential anxiety; and (c) the appeal of the make-believe characters or narrative (Popper, 2013).

The characterizations of Black women in the superwoman role includes the following: (a) an obligation to present an image of strength for their family members; (b) an obligation to suppress emotions out of fear as being viewed as being weak; (c) as a form of resistance to being vulnerable or dependent, or having people mistake their kindness for weakness; (d) their determination to succeed, despite having limited resources, and the sense of pride that comes with it; and (e), their obligation to help others, and having a difficulty saying “no” (Woods-Giscombé, 2010 p. 26).

There is usually one item worn by every superhero representing characteristics of a super strength such as resilience: for Spider-Man, it was his mask; for Batman, it was his suit; and for Superman, it was his cape. These items represented the ability to overcome adversity and the willingness to achieve and promote positive outcomes instead of adverse effects (Popper, 2013). There is a link between identity and hair presentation for black girls and women. Hairstyles for black women represent more than just achieving a specific look; hairstyles give some women a sense of self-worth they may not often feel in society (Johnson and Bankhead, 2014).
Culturally Specific Coping Strategies

Aside from being used as a symbol of strength for black women, hair also often tells a story of the woman’s past, present, and future (Teteh et al., 2017). One area of the Strong Black Women stereotypes that, if often overlooked, is how the Black woman may internalize this role and the effects it may have on her wellbeing (West et al., 2016). Coping strategies may be referred to as the efforts made to resolve problems, manage, endure, or alleviate distress (Greer, 2011, p. 215). Most existing means of coping are rooted in an ethnocentric European worldview and conceptual framework (Utsey et al., 2000). The basis of this framework suggests that coping is either problem-focused or emotion-focused. Problem-focused coping involves using individual behaviors to manage stress or eliminate the sources of stress. Emotion-focused coping reduces the emotional consequences of stressful events (Schoenmakers et al., 2015). In some cases, African Americans may utilize problem-focused or emotion-focused forms of coping with stress (Utsey et al., 2000); however, coping is also a process; therefore, the option in which someone chooses to cope may change over time (Schoenmakers et al., 2015). Due to the uniqueness of their life situations, experiences, and history, African Americans have adopted more culturally specific coping strategies that are more suitable to respond to stress (Utsey et al., 2000).

Cultural Coping Skills to Manage Stress

Culturally specific coping strategies refer to the influence of cultural heritage and knowledge to give meaning to a stressful event and provide resources for dealing with stressors (Lewis-Coles & Constantine, 2006). Women in the Black community tend to rely on those closest to them in the community to help cope with stress; however, there is not always a support system consisting of close family and friends to be of assistance (Copeland & Snyder, 2011).
These stressors, which typically includes problems, hardships, or threats that challenge their adaptive abilities, are often exacerbated by sociocultural factors such as issues of race, gender, and social class; and the impact these stressors have on their everyday lives and the ability to cope (Everett et al., 2010). The impact of race-related issues can often lead to anxiety and depression among black women; however, ritual-centered behaviors can reduce psychological symptoms (Greer, 2011).

**Cognitive Emotional Debriefing**

African American women who have experienced institutional racism-related stress often utilize cognitive/emotional debriefing (Lewis-Coles & Constantine, 2006). Cognitive Emotional debriefing is an adaptive reaction by African Americans, which involves distraction, venting, and processing stressful incidents with others to manage environmental stressors (Utsey et al., 2000; Greer, 2011). The practice of Cognitive Emotional Debriefing was likely to have evolved in response to African Americans being enslaved for centuries and to racial oppression (Utsey et al., 2000). However, there is a need to develop more culturally accepted and competent skills to help the women of this community feel more comfortable discussing their challenges, finding healthy ways of coping, and seeking professional services when needed (Copeland & Snyder, 2011).

**Religious Coping**

The most utilized coping strategies among black women are self-improvement, which includes: (a) education; (b) prayer; and (c) both proactive and passive avoidant strategies (Greer, 2011). Avoidance as a coping skill can be adaptive (Everett et al., 2010); however, avoidant strategies have been associated with adverse outcomes such as poor self-esteem, low life satisfaction, and psychological distress (Greer, 2011). One popular form of coping among
African Americans, which can be considered avoidant or problem-focused, depending on the context, is religious coping (Assari, 2014). Like most other forms of coping for black women, religious coping provides a source of community and social support. It is grounded in their history and has a strong connection to their upbringing and experiences. This form of coping is the lens that filters their views and perspectives and focuses on their beliefs, outlooks, and individual behavior, providing a resource for resilience and coping (Vanderweele et al., 2017).

Religious coping is looking to God for strength, support, and guidance. It includes behaviors and activities such as praying, reading scriptures, and seeking assistance from religious, social networks, or clergy when responding to caregiving burdens, health problems, poverty, problematic life situations, major life events, racism, and stressful episodes (Chatters et al., 2010). Members of different races and ethnicities all practice a form of religious coping (Assari, 2014); however, this form of coping is common among African Americans and Black Caribbean’s compared to non-Hispanic Whites and women more than men (Chatters et al., 2010). When facing stressful events, African Americans are 44% more likely to pray as a form of coping more than facing the problem head-on, working on a solution, keeping busy, or staying relaxed (Chatters et al., 2010). Although African Americans and Caribbean blacks are two distinctively different groups regarding cultural, national, and history within the U.S. regarding immigration status, these groups share a common racial heritage (Chatters et al., 2010). Both groups descend from Africa, where religiosity is a dominant sub-type of culture within the African culture utilized to manage or reduce the effects of traumatic experiences and maintain an overall sense of well-being (Adedoyin et al., 2016).
Community-Based Support Systems

Faith-Based Organizations

With religious coping being a coping skill for many African Americans to deal with stress, Churches and other faith-based organizations have primarily served as a venue to address the health and behavior-related interventions in the African American communities (Whitt-Glover, 2016). Black women have a longstanding reputation as the backbones of support in the black church and the community (Coleman, 2008; Avent Harris, 2019). Social interaction has health benefits for African Americans and has been instrumental in keeping the community engaged (Taylor et al., 2016). As a staple in the community, the church is easily accessible and has regular contact with community members who need health education and support (Galiatsatos & Hale, 2016). Members of this community often rely heavily on religious coping (Hays, 2015) and many faith-based interventions like scripture and prayer, which provide a sense of deeper connection and reasoning behind developing and engaging in healthy behaviors (Palmer et al., 2020). However, one maladaptive form of avoidance through religious coping is Spiritual Bypass, which refers to avoiding psychological concerns by exercising exaggerated spiritual practices and beliefs (Fox et al., 2017). Engaging in both negative and positive religious coping can have long term effects on the well-being of African Americans (Park et al., 2018).

Churches, especially those with larger memberships, have many African American women who volunteer to help ministries address health disparities (Austin & Harris 2011). However, meeting these needs of the community requires ongoing commitment (Galiatsatos & Hale, 2016). Still, as churches become more and more inundated with different initiatives, it is more difficult to focus on health promotions and interventions (Palmer et al., 2020). To fully engage in supporting the community in providing health education and screening, the church's
volunteer members need to be well-trained and collaborate with community-based providers (Galiatsatos & Hale, 2016). Other barriers that interfere with church no longer being the primary place of support for the well-being of the community include a new generation of young adults joining the likes of many African American men, who do not attend church regularly as do African American women and older adults (Palmer et al., 2020). As part of the mitigation efforts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the doors of many churches across the nation have been closed, which further limited the support churches are able to be of support to the community (Desouza et al., 2021).

**Barbershops and Salons**

Barbershops and Beauty salons are popular small community businesses (Jackson & Sanyal, 2019), which, along with black churches, have been considered historically significant in the Black community (Pillay, 2011). However, with churches becoming less popular with the younger generation, Barbershops and Beauty Salons are becoming an alternative environment to address the factors that influence African Americans' behavior (Palmer et al., 2020).

Salons are similar to worship communities, as they are often a place where women seek refuge and healing (Browne, 2006). For over a century, beauty salons have been a place of information sharing and advice sharing in Black women's lives (Gill, 2015). Madam C.J. Walker is credited for her instrumental role in establishing foundational hair care techniques and self-empowerment (Neil & Mbilshaka, 2019).

In addition to being compared to worship communities, historically, spaces that provide hair care services to the black community have been at the center of responding to their psycho-emotional needs (Mbilishaka, 2018). In the Black community, Beauty Salons are an ideal setting for reaching women (Reiter & Linnan, 2011), and the stylists are often viewed as mentors, health
educators (Bassett et al., 2018), and confidants who are usually privy to the personal history of their clients (Browne, 2006).

Black women tend to carry a lot of burdens, which includes: (a) the fear of losing their children, (b) economic stress, (c) feelings of being tired and drained, and (d) the perceptions of service providers being ineffective. The perceptions that clinicians would be ineffective in assisting Black women due to having a lack of first-hand knowledge of their challenges is part of the reason Black women have a hard time showing their burdens or seeking professional help (Copeland & Snyder, 2011).

Clients and stylists often spend a lot of time in the presence of one another and develop a relationship where they mutually feel comfortable speaking on subjects ranging from work, family, and relationships. As a result of these conversations, some clients reported feeling comfortable enough to share personal health issues and behaviors with their stylists (Johnson et al., 2010). Considering the challenges Black women face, mental health professionals in the community are more equipped to navigate life’s challenges. However, using salons to provide outreach to the community is innovative (DiVietro et al., 2015) due to the relationships and bonding that takes place during appointments.

Many women in this community are socialized to face adversity with strength; however, there are points in life when the inner strength may not match the outer appearance of strength. Women are struggling, and fears of being labeled, hospitalized, and losing their children result in a mistrust of the mental health systems (Copeland & Snyder, 2011). Therefore, to reach populations most at risk for health disparities, barbershops, and beauty salons are considered a propitious setting (Linnan et al., 2014). Therefore, it would benefit the community for
professionals to encourage black women to utilize their informal support networks (Hall et al., 2012) and offer stylist basic counseling techniques to address the community's needs.

The Salon Experience

A salon is a place that helps to transform those who come in for services, but in addition to an outer transformation, an inner transformation may also occur. Through empathetic listening, the stylist can reduce the client's emotional burden while changing their image (Hanson, 2019). Even though Black women may feel more comfortable opening up to their stylist instead of a professional, the salon experience is not always a pseudo-therapeutic one where the stylist is always ready to engage in a deep conversation. Stylists often put on their therapist hat based on the lead of the client's direction. In other words, they become that listening ear in response to the emotions displayed. When the client expresses positive emotions, the stylist does not need to respond since there is no present need to regulate the internal emotions and external display of the client's emotions (Medler-Liraz, 2016).

The level of comfort for Black women to open up in the salon setting may be due to the pervading tone or mood of the atmosphere. A common staple in salons that primarily offer services to Black women is music. One would question if it were for the entertainment effect or the therapeutic effect. Sounds in the salon are often used as emotion curtains that can distract from stress or distress (Shortt, 2013). Playing music in a salon may be simply for entertainment in some cases; however, music can have an inadvertent influence on emotions and may be a useful tool for enhancing awareness and processing emotions (Weisgerber et al., 2013). The use of music is a common and valuable tool when dealing with emotions. Music is a tool often used in hospital settings for acute psychiatric patients and has been shown to help recognize the current state of emotions, expressions, and self-exploration (Shuman et al., 2015).
The Role of the Stylist.

When someone enters the stylist profession, they are often accepting the role of a part-time therapist (Fernbach, 2016). Black women need to be engaged on a cultural level (Mbilshaka, 2018), so whether intended or not, many stylists have become confidants to their clients (Browne, 2006). The characteristics of the hairstylist, in addition to their age, sex, race/ethnicity, can influence a clients’ receptivity to a stylist-delivered intervention (Floyd et al., 2017). The reason clients may commit to a stylist is often based on emotions. Positive and negative emotions are a predictor of loyal intentions (Raxxaq et al., 2017). Front line employees, such as stylists, will be engaged in repeated exchange, resulting in positive relationship preservation effects (Zablah, 2017). The relationship fostered between the stylist and her clients are not limited to the younger generation. Stylists play the role of community gatekeepers for their older clients as well. Regular interactions during visits promote a close relationship. Older clients often feel comfortable sharing personal details of their lives. In turn, stylists tend to show a concern for the well-being of their older clients. They help them recognize their problems and offer them support (Anderson et al., 2010).

Many stylists have learned to become great listeners but do not necessarily initiate conversations with their clients (Linnan et al., 2012). There is, however, a great value that comes from sharing attitudes with a good listener; the outcome is that it helps shape that attitude for the one who is sharing. Feedback, however, is vital. Listening helps to calm anxieties and lead the person who is sharing into a discussion that would create an opportunity to dig deeper and develop a self-reflective insight that creates greater self-awareness (Itxchahov et al., 2018). Stylists would need formal training to teach them how to recognize signs of stress, screening, and how to address their clients' health-related questions and concerns appropriately. Stylists...
can benefit from training that would include health and mental health information. Studies have identified clients who felt that due to their stylist's interpersonal communication style, unprofessional or exhibit negative characteristics, would be less likely to consider their recommendations pertaining to health-related issues (Floyd et al., 2017).

**Stylists as Othermothers.** Other mothering is defined as taking on the responsibility of raising a child that is not their own, which may occur in either a formal or informal way (Edwards, 2000; James 1993). The practice of communal lifestyles and interdependence of community’s dates back to West Africa where the concept originated (Edwards, 2000), and was birthed from the relationships that were formed when children were separated from their parents, primarily the mothers who were sold into slavery, and extended family members who were heavily relied on for support (Edwards, 2000). This practice then carried over into the United States (Tang, Jang, Carr, & Copeland, 2015) with slave women beginning to care for the children of children of the slaves who had been left on the plantations motherless due to slave trading and depredation (Edwards, 2000).

This practice has continued for several generations out of necessity (Mercer, 2016). Black people tend to care for one another who are both extended family members and have no blood relationship (Edwards, 2000) to equip black children with psychological and social skills to survive issues such as racism and, sexism (Mercer, 2016). What initially began as a system of childcare; has now transitioned into the care for any individual in need (Mercer, 2016). Adults have the opportunity to become mentors to other adults on issues that involve healing and self-realization (Mercer,2016). Stylists and clients spend a lot of time with one another, and the salon's community can create a sense of family.
This population has a unique culture of an extended family structure that promotes strength, relationships, and resources. Ideally, maternal caregivers set the standard for young African American girls to measure their beauty (Pope et al., 2014). Young black women are often taught by mothers or maternal caregivers how to cope with stress (Hall, 2018). Black mothers often share their experience with their daughters' stressors and how they use to survive, which results in the young girl growing up to demonstrate strength when faced with stressful events (Hall, 2018).

Exploring the stories about mother-daughter relationships during the hairstyling is a viable source of data in this area (Wilson et al., 2018); but, unfortunately, for many women in the Black community, family members, especially parents, are not a source of tangible or emotional support (Woods-Giscombé’, 2010). When adults cannot receive adequate emotional support as children, other mothers may step in later in life to help the mature, empower them to become self-reliant and empower them as individuals (Mercer, 2016). When women expand their scope of motherhood beyond their biological relationship, they can empower a community (Thomas, 2018). Other mothering can be a powerful and valuable practice (Thomas, 2018), which creates an opportunity for the community to grow and for the children to be socialized in the community's traditions (Flowers & Palmer, 2015). Other mothering has contributed to the increase of educational, socioeconomic, and social status within members of the Black community and has been deemed as a tool for active change in the community, with benefits that include, but are not limited to increased academic success with younger women, goal commitment (Flowers and Palmer, 2015), and decision-making processes (Thomas, 2018).
Salon-Based Health Education Systems and Screenings

In addition to the relationship building that takes place in salons, salon-based health education and screening have gained popularity in recent years (Browne, 2006). In the black community, adults, especially younger adults, are experiencing chronic diseases at disproportionate rates compared to non-Hispanic whites (Palmer et al., 2020). Therefore, community partnerships with same race healthcare providers and community members who work as healthcare workers are essential when it comes to reducing cultural barriers that interfere with members of this community receiving adequate care. Services such as supporting coordinated care, connecting people with appropriate resources, having the ability to provide interventions, and identifying the socioeconomic and other factors that create promote health disparities are often missed because either the interventions and resources are not easily accessible, or interventions are not designed with cultural elements in mind (Palmer et al., 2020).

Unfortunately, some people do not have a regular medical care provider in the black community but have regular hair care providers (Browne, 2006). In addition to inadequate health promotion research that underrepresented African Americans, sociocultural factors such as the cost of seeing a primary health care provider, systemic racism, and a lack of trust in the health care system prevent the proper use of health care providers. Palmer et al., (2020) has identified an urgent need to develop health promotion interventions that are culturally appropriate. These interventions may include posters, brochures, and videos (Linnan et al., 2014), which would be acceptable to engage members of the black communities and reduce the barriers that contribute to health inequities (Palmer et al., 2020).

As stated previously, churches, barbershops, and salons are considered staples in the black community (Pillay, 2011). These establishments are easily accessible and provide a haven
for communalism and expressiveness (Palmer et al., 2020). Black women tend to spend a considerable amount of time at the salon, despite financial commitment, physical discomfort, and harmful chemical exposure. Still, hair and hair care is important to this community's women (Palmer et al., 2020). The tradeoff is valuable compared to the sources of strength, safety, cultural heritage, and social connections received in this environment (Linnan et al., 2014). More importantly, the uniqueness and closeness of relationships that have been developed between clients and their stylists have created a buzz surrounding using hairstylists to deliver health communications to the clients (Palmer et al., 2020). Stylists will not be as effective in delivering the message about health care as a professional in the medical field but utilizing stylists to assist in providing health education messages and using the salons to provide screenings can offer short-term benefits to the community (Linnan et al., 2012).

**Utilizing the Salons to Assist with COVID-19 Response Efforts**

While the pandemic in itself was a healthcare concern on a monumental scale. The response efforts have created a barrier for screening and addressing some of the comorbidities that resulted in higher mortality rates among the black community (Skeete et al., 2020). While pre-pandemic, the salons were utilized to screen for diseases such as Colon screening (Floyd et al., 2017) and HIV (Bassett et al., 2019), or social problems such as intimate partner violence (Beebe et al., 2017), the salon can also be used to screen and bring awareness to diseases that compound the effects of the coronavirus such as Hypertension and Diabetes (Skeete et al., 2020).

As a result of the response efforts of the pandemic, many of the financial resources have been utilized towards COVID-19 response efforts such as providing stimulus for the economy, COVID-19 testing, research, and vaccination. In addition, social distancing protocols resulted in clinics and healthcare facilities providing services on a limited basis. Even as the restrictions
begin to ease, there are still people who are not comfortable with attending appointments in a clinic or healthcare facility, out of concern for there being other people who may be infected. Telehealth and video visits are being utilized more frequently to address these concerns, but it is not conducive for in-person screenings and for the people who are still in fear, but also not quite tech savvy. These barriers can result in potential gaps that results in misdiagnosis and risks of complications. Since many women still frequent the salons, despite their concerns with the healthcare settings, salons and barbershops may be able to assist with reaching members of this at-risk community (Skeete et al., 2020).

**Professional vs Supportive Means of Support**

Although it has been identified previously why the salon is an ideal setting to disseminate health related information and screenings, based on the personal accounts of black women, there is still little known why the barriers to seeking Mental Health Treatment exist (Ward et al., 2009). In 2009, a study was conducted to understand better the mental health/illness information and service delivery preferences among African American residents in Baltimore, researchers were able to identify some of the barriers to seeking information and mental health services. These barriers included a fear of stigma and perception of racism and existing cultural and traditional beliefs regarding mental illness. The study used a sample of 42 African Americans who were not connected to the mental health system at the time of the study. The participants identified other barriers such as: a lack of money, a lack of insurance, and an unfamiliar atmosphere. Stigma appeared to be the barrier's nucleus, primarily due to the stereotypes or myths regarding the stigma that were personalized and influenced by the community. Some of these stereotypes or myths included: (a) the assumption or belief that mental illness was contagious; (b) the assumption that people with mental illness are all dangerous and
unpredictable; (c) the assumption that people with mental illness will never recover; (d) shame and dishonor associated with mental illness because it is perceived to represent a personal weakness, a curse, stain, or sin; and (d) the assumption that if an individual goes to a professional for mental health assistance, there are likely to be labeled and forced into treatment (Mishra et al., 2009).

This study concluded that in response to the stigma associated with mental health, African Americans might either deny themselves treatment or avoid seeking help. The fear associated with the stigma can sometimes cause an individual to deny their distress, frame their distress in alternative ways, and possibly avoid treatment modalities that would suggest their distress is a result of a mental illness (Mishra et al., 2019). The study participants advised that as a result of the associated stigma, African Americans preferred to receive services and information disseminated in ways and through people they are familiar with, feel they can trust, offer reassurance, and keep everything confidential (Mishra et al., 2009). This study supports the proposed research that seeks to identify whether Black women are more comfortable with seeking assistance for their stress through the interaction with a stylist due to the familiarity of the environment.

**Betrayal Trauma Theory**

One of the contributing factors to mental health disparities and a barrier to seeking treatment in the United States may be institutional betrayal (Gomez, 2015). Smith and Freyd (2013) suggest that women who experience institutional betrayal experience high post-traumatic symptoms. Trauma associated with institutional betrayal lies within the betrayal, the events leading up to the betrayal, and following the betrayal.
Betrayal Trauma refers to a social element of trauma unrelated to an individuals’ response to trauma. Most often, betrayal trauma occurs in an environment where the victim depended on people or an institution for safety and survival, and their safety was violated significantly (Freyd et al., 2007). The Betrayal Trauma Theory best explains the outcomes associated with this form of trauma within an institutional setting. This theory predicts that after experiencing trauma in an institutional setting, it becomes difficult for an individual to continue functioning in that same environment (Smith & Freyd, 2013).

Like with interpersonal relationships, there is an expectancy for institutions to provide a sense of safety and trust. When someone suffers any form of abuse, either directly or indirectly within institutional environments, the abuse produces the same adverse effects as interpersonal abuse (Smith & Freyd 2013). The Behavioral Trauma Theory suggests that people are good at detecting betrayals. One form of response to the betrayal is displayed by withdrawing their relationship. High-betrayal traumas compared to low betrayal traumas can be associated with higher disassociation levels (Freyd et al., 2007). Two examples of Institutional Betrayal Trauma in the African American community are the story of Henrietta Lacks and the Tuskegee Syphilis Study. Both studies have not only helped shape distrust of the healthcare system; they help explain why some Black people have displayed distrust with the COVID-19 vaccine (Bajaj & Stanford, 2021).

**Henrietta Lacks and HeLa Cells.** One prime example of institutional betrayal where there is a significant amount of mistrust among African Americans towards medical organizations can be seen on a large scale in the heart of Baltimore, Maryland (Galiastsatos & Hale, 2014). This deeply rooted mistrust level has simmered over several generations, resulting from the cervical cancer cells taken from Henrietta Lacks and used for research without
permission. The cervical cancer cells, now infamously known as the HeLa cells, were extracted from Henrietta Lacks, an African American female, a former resident of the Turner Station area of Baltimore (Galiastsatos & Hale, 2014). After being removed, the cells were harvested and grown for medical research at the Johns Hopkins hospital without her family's permission and knowledge for 60 years.

The immortal HeLa cells changed the field of cancer research, the cancer industry and have been shared in the research science community for many decades, which ultimately launched the field of virology (Powell, 2011; Skoot, 2010). Unfortunately, in addition to the benefits to science and private business, the family of Henrietta Lacks never received any compensation (Powell, 2011; Skoot, 2010). The result is a mistrust of the African American community towards the healthcare system (Powell, 2011; Skoot, 2010).

*Tuskegee Syphilis Study.* African Americans have a long history of negative past experiences that stem from health researchers' abuse and are more likely to distrust the healthcare system than other racial/ethnic groups. Another historical example contributing to this distrust is the Tuskegee Syphilis Study (Muvuka et al., 2020). Between the years 1932 and 1972, the United States Government funded a research project called the Tuskegee Syphilis Study under the guise of documenting the course of syphilis. The study participants were poor African American men who participated in the study in exchange for free meals, medical exams, and burial insurance. The participants believed they received treatment for what was referred to as “bad blood.” Instead of treatment, the participants were deprived of demonstratively effective treatment to keep the project going. As a result, these men suffered from sores, fever, hair loss, weight loss, headaches, paralysis, blindness, and even death (Yearby, 2016).
Unfortunately, nothing was gained from this study. There was already a documented study on the disease process, and in the current study, there was no testing of a possible treatment for syphilis. The participants were denied access to treatment. The participants and their families suffered from disability and death for 40 years for no other reason than to exploit poor minorities (Yearby, 2016). Since the truth surrounding the study was revealed in 1972, the story has been passed down for generations in the African American community to substantiate the claim of there being inherent injustices towards African Americans in the medical field (Lee et al., 2018)

**Mental and Emotional Benefits of Social Interactions and Relationships**

When dealing with stress, seeking some form of support for Black women is essential given the evidence that supports the possibility of harmful effects of loneliness (Mann et al., 2017), including symptoms of depression and anxiety (Wang et al., 2018). Black women are known for being a pillar of support for their families and communities (Abrams et al., 2019; Dour et al., 2014). Women supporting one another give many black women strength. This community of women thrives on the support of having others around. They tend to find it difficult to discuss their loneliness and develop negative or shameful attitudes around their feelings of loneliness (Mann et al., 2017). Engaging in interventions that focus on releasing emotional expressions have the potential to shift negative feelings and issues associated with isolation and helplessness (Hall et al., 2012)

Psychological support is not limited to the therapist only (Davis et al., 2019). Historically, in the Black community, hair care service establishments have been at the center of responding to community members' psycho-emotional needs (Mbilshaka, 2018). In addition,
black women need to be engaged on a cultural level, so hairstylists serve as natural helpers in their communities to address the psychological needs of neglected people (Johnson et al., 2010).

There is a benefit for educators and practitioners to understand what a woman may be struggling with when she decides to change her hairstyle (Ellis-Hervey, 2016). The social support received from a stylist is often obtained by happenstance. There is a lot of social engagement and storytelling in salons. Sharing personal experiences through storytelling functions as a form of identity formation and characterizes membership into a shared status group (Wilkins, 2012). Mental health providers should acknowledge the significance of the impact. As a result, hairstylists should receive basic training from mental health professionals to assist their clients. Knowing when there is a presenting issue and how to address that issue besides changing a hairstyle adequately can be beneficial. Still, most importantly, the stylist should know when to make professional referrals (Mbilshaka, 2018).

Summary

The Theoretical framework for this study relies on the Relational Cultural Theory that suggests that humans yearn for connections and relationships that speak to their needs and are mutually beneficial. The Theory of Planned Behavior also suggests that self-stigma and perceived barriers create a basis for help-seeking behaviors, resulting in people being more willing to engage in activities to control the outcome.

Reviewing the existing research through this theoretical lens, it has been determined that the content and context of the information discussed in this chapter supports the beliefs that Black women utilize the salon as a culturally specific form of coping with stress.
This chapter provided additional support on hairstyling practices for Black women, relating to their image. There was a review on how black women with a reputation for being strong black women need to connect with other women and receive community-based support. Although black women tend to rely on religion as a form of coping, salons have stood alongside the churches in the black community for providing support and disseminating information that contributes to the wellbeing of the members of this community. Finally, there was a review of the health care system moving forward with recognizing the benefits of utilizing the salons to reach black women at high risk for diseases that exacerbate the effects of the coronavirus.

Supporting evidence showed why the Black community still distrust the healthcare systems due to institutional betrayals. The current research also introduced relationships that have been established between black women and their stylists. The hope is to fill the gap in the research and provide empirical evidence to identify the benefits which stylist and client interaction has on their clients' mental and emotional well-being and support the possible implementation of basic counseling training programs for stylists in the future.
Chapter Three: Methods

Overview

The purpose of this hermeneutical phenomenological study is to explore and describe the lived experience of the client-stylist relationship for black women in the United States. This chapter presents an overview of qualitative and hermeneutical phenomenology, which are the research methods used for this study. In addition, this chapter provides details on the eligibility and recruitment of participants, the procedures used to collect and analyze the data, and the methods used to ensure both trustworthiness and ethical considerations of the study.

Design

This study was designed to describe the lived experience of the interaction between Black women and their stylists. In addition, I sought to generate a sense of the meaning of this interaction by interpreting the lived experiences provided by the participants. Therefore, the best approach for this study was qualitative research using the hermeneutical phenomenological design. This selected approach is explained in detail in the following sections.

Qualitative Research

This phenomenological study aims to explore the relationship between Black women and the stylist in the United States. Qualitative research is the best-suited approach to conduct this study since the focus is on participants sharing their lived experiences. The qualitative researcher captures the essence of the experience to understand and identify the emerging themes and share them with the evolving world through writings and interpretations (Heppner et al., 2016).

Beginning with an assumption, the researcher used an interpretive or theoretical framework to highlight the research problems associated with the stylist and client interactions between black women (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study was conducted virtually via the
Zoom App platform due to the social distancing restrictions resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. The final written presentation reflects the participants' voice, a reflection of the researcher's context, descriptions, and interpretations of the data, and the research's contribution to future literature (Creswell & Poth, p.8).

The researcher understood that qualitative research tends to be more complex and time-consuming than quantitative analysis. However, qualitative research was the better approach to help the researcher understand the stylist and client interaction for Black women in a way that quantitative analysis would not have been able to reflect. The goal was to show a need to implement or incorporate basic counseling training for stylists to support meeting their clients' mental and emotional needs (Heppner et al., 2016).

**Phenomenology**

Phenomenological research has its roots grounded in philosophy and is based on the writings of Edmund Husserl, a German mathematician (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Phenomenological research is used to describe the meaning of the lived experience for several individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018). One of the features that should be included in phenomenological research is a phenomenon to be explored. This research seeks to use hermeneutical phenomenology, oriented towards the lived experiences of individuals and groups (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this research, the phenomenon would be the interaction between Black Women and their stylists. The participants' sample size may vary from 5-25 individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The data collection consists of interviewing individuals who have experienced the phenomena. The participants' statements were used to find common themes, resulting in a broader unit that consisted of the elements of what the individuals experienced and how they experienced them (Creswell and Poth, 2018). Hermeneutic phenomenological research
was chosen because this study was conducted to ascribe meaning to the stylist and client
interactions in the Black community and determine if this interaction is a culturally specific form
of coping with benefits to mental and emotional health. The goal was to take stories of the
individual participants and use those stories to describe the common “whats” and “hows” of the
experience for all the participants of the study (Heppner et al., 2015).

Research Questions

Qualitative research does not begin with a proposed hypothesis but instead uses research
questions and research tools to understand the phenomena better (Heppner et al., 2016). The
research questions for a phenomenological study are designed to help the
researchers understand the lived experience and determine what those experiences mean to them
(Heppner et al., 2015). The research questions should be nondirectional, open-ended, and
evolving, starting with a central question and then followed up with several sub-questions
(Creswell and Poth, 2018).

The following research questions helped the researcher of this study ascribe meaning to
the interaction between client and stylist and ultimately determine if they can benefit from
training to identify and address their clients' mental and emotional challenges. The questions
were:

**RQ1**: How do Black women describe the cultural aspects of the salon experience?

**Sub Question 1**: How do Black women describe their experience with social support?

**Sub Question 2**: How do Black women describe the overall wellbeing experience of the
salon experience?

**Sub Question 3**: How do Black women describe their experiences when the salons
closed during the COVID-19 pandemic?

**Setting**

Due to social distancing restrictions resulting from the COVID-19, interviews were conducted via Zoom and recorded on the Zoom platform. In addition, a camcorder was used for backup footage and a voice recorder for audible recordings (Creswell, 2018) if the Zoom platform were to go offline or if a stable Wi-fi connection could not be made or maintained for the duration of the interviews.

**Participants**

Purposive Sampling, a nonrandom technique, was used to recruit participants for this study. This technique was used to make a deliberate selection based on the qualities of the participants, their availability, willingness to participate, and their ability to reflect and express their experiences and opinions (Etikan et al., 2016). Contact was made with stylists who predominantly provide hair care services to black women, advising them of the nature of the study. The criteria asked participants to refer clients who met the criteria and would be willing to participate in the study. The researcher did not elicit any of her clients as participants in this study; however, she asked that they refer anyone they believed met the criteria and would be willing to participate.

Once the interested potential participants were identified, they were contacted utilizing the contact information they provided. Once communication was established, the researcher described the study's nature, conducted a preliminary screening, and set a date and time to complete the interview. Once the participants agreed to the parameters, they were sent a written copy of the consent form (Appendix B), read, signed, and returned before the agreed interview date and time. The goal was to get 16 participants in and conduct individual interviews.
The sample group used for this study was required first to have lived the experience (Heppner et al., 2015); therefore, criterion sampling was used since this form of sampling works well with participants representing the people who have experienced the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It was recommended that all participants identify themselves as Black females ages 25-75 years old, who have visited the salon at least 15 times in the past two years and must have been committed to the same salon or stylist for a minimum of one year. Participants ages 25-75 years old were chosen because of their different age ranges' different perspectives and insights. Women as young as 25-years old may provide a millennial's perspective on the current views of seeking mental health treatment and provide insight on coping strategies in response to stress that this generation practices. Young adults to early middle-aged women will most likely have a variety of perspectives on the benefits of the stylist and client interactions. These are the ages when family, work, and social dynamics are evolving, in addition to their views on seeking mental health treatments with professionals. The elderly population was believed to have a unique perspective to share since they have experienced these phenomena through several generations.

The participants should have visited a salon a minimum of 15 times in the past two years, with at least 10 of the visits occurring the year before the COVID-19 pandemic. Initially, the criteria were for one-year to show a commitment to the salon experience; however, due to the shutdown of hair salons in response to the pandemic, some clients may not have visited a salon and may not have been comfortable regularly returning at this time. The rationale was that the participants who visit the salon less than ten times per year might merely receive a particular style or treatment. Therefore, less than ten times does not show a commitment to the salon
experience and may not be enough time spent with a stylist to create a social bond where the client would feel comfortable discussing personal issues.

Choosing women who visit the salon a minimum of 10 times would allow Black women who wear their hair in different styles. For example, a woman who regularly goes to the salon for a wash and set may need to visit the salon approximately 12-24 times per year, but women who wear braids or locs may only require maintenance roughly every 4-6 weeks. A minimum of 10 times per year and a stylist or salon commitment for one year helped identify the population suitable for this study and showed a significant amount of time to create a bond with the stylist.

**Locating the Sample Group Participants**

To locate potential participants, a recruitment post was made to notify the members of the study and ask for participation by contacting several local stylists and identifying stylists or participants on social media through the following groups:

- Active Sisterlocks™ consultants and trainees’ group (FB group)
- Atlanta Black Hair Styles and Stylists (Facebook public group),
- Atlanta Hair and Makeup Slayers (Facebook public group)
- Clinicians of Color in Private Practice (a private Facebook group)
- H40 (A Natural Hair Group for 40+ (Facebook private group)
- Hairstylist group (private Facebook page)
- Liberty University Community Care and Counseling EdD Cohort (a private Facebook group)
- Liberty University’s Doctoral Cohort (private Facebook page)
- Loc’d N Grace, LLC, Facebook page, (Facebook public page)
- Natural Hair (public Facebook page)
Sisterlocked and lovin’ it (a public Facebook group)
Sisterlocked group (a public Facebook group)
Sisterlocked with fine or thinning hair (a public Facebook group)

In addition, contact was made to several stylists and salon owners, notifying them of the study and asking permission to either post a notification of the study at their shop or to have permission to come in and speak with the clients to tell them about the study.

**Procedures**

**Session Proceedings**

Due to the social distancing practices in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was best for interviews to occur via Zoom; therefore, clients received the institutional review board-approved consent document required to be signed and returned before the start of the interview. The participants received a copy of the informed consent summary and were asked to complete a brief socio-demographic and salon characteristics questionnaire. Before asking questions, introductions were made, and a brief PowerPoint was shown to each focus group outlining and reiterating a quick overview of the study. Participants were allowed to introduce themselves and state the salon they patronize. All sessions were audio-recorded and videotaped for later review of dialogue, non-verbal behaviors, and signs of discomfort among the participants (Floyd et al., 2017).

**Analysis**

All audio and Videotapes were transcribed using Zoom software, Rev.com, and the researcher. The analytic process was conducted using two waves; the first wave of analysis was
observing interviews; the second wave was observing the interviews again. The researcher uploaded all information using NVivo software to generate initial codes and identify themes. The researcher then refined codes and themes if necessary. Once saturation was met, the themes that appeared to be the consensus and most relevant to the study’s research were utilized for the study's report (Floyd et al., 2017).

**Data Collection**

Gathering information was conducted through face-to-face interviews on Zoom. The interviews were semi-structured and consisted of open-ended questions that allowed the participants to speak freely about their lived experiences. Interviews were conducted in a closed and confidential area for a duration of 30-90-minute sessions based on the responses and needs for sub-questions. The focus of the interview was the experience of the stylist and client interactions, the factors that foster the bonds between client and stylist, the benefits of the exchanges, the stylist preparedness to identify and address mental and emotional needs of the client, and any emotional and mental impact the salon experience had on the well-being of these individuals.

After providing full disclosure of the study and receiving the signed consent (see Appendix B) of the participants to participate in the study and be recorded, the researcher began the interviews where both video and audio were recorded using Zoom, a voice memo recorder, and a cell phone. To interpret the data, files were created and organized based on participants. After reviewing the recordings and the field notes, the transcriptions were read, and emergent ideas were noted by reading through the transcription, making margin notes, and forming initial codes. The initial codes were then described and classified into themes by telling the participants’ personal experiences, free of the researcher's judgment, and explaining the
phenomenon's overall essence. Next, the individual participants' significant statements were extracted, and group common statements were used to develop meaning units. The information was then used to create the essence by describing the “whats” and “hows” of the experience. Finally, a composite description of the salon experience for Black women was developed (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Observations

The researcher conducted the interviews as an observer using audiovisual materials during the individual conversations (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The Researchers Role

As an African American woman, who owns a natural hair care business and personally provides hair care services to women in the Black Community, the researcher has a personal investment in the research study topic. Furthermore, given her position as a natural hairstylist and a client, she had personal experiences that shaped her views on the impact of salon closures amid the COVID-19 pandemic and the potential benefits of the stylist and client interactions on the wellbeing of black women. Therefore, the researcher recommended approaching the study with a fresh perspective on the phenomenon and setting aside personal experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Furthermore, as an African American woman, the researcher maintains a personal and passionate commitment to the authenticity of this study's results; therefore, she committed to remaining neutral by not using interviewing any of her own clients and bracket personal views while conducting the interviews, interpreting the data, and writing the findings.

Data Collection

Interviews
Interview Questions

1. Please introduce yourself to me as if we just met one another.
2. How would you describe your experiences with going to the stylist?
3. How would you describe your feelings when you are unable to make an appointment with your hairstylist?
4. How would describe your level of commitment to your stylist?
5. How would you describe your experience in the salon aside from getting your hair done?
6. How would you describe the experience of going to the salon as a child?
7. How would you describe your relationship with your stylist?
8. How would you describe how the environment of the salon factors into your level of comfort with the salon experience?
9. How would you describe the experience of speaking to stylist about personal matters?
10. Please describe how maintaining your own hair differed from your hairstyling experiences prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Data Analysis

The researcher was the primary instrument for collecting the data for this study through interviewing, observation, and document analysis (Chenail, 2011). The first technique used for data analysis was open coding. Coding the data was used for its major categories of information to identify one core phenomenon. The researcher went back to the data and created categories around the core phenomenon to determine the categories identified around the core phenomenon. Coding allowed the researcher to organize the data into the identified common themes. The second technique developed and assessed interpretations to make sense of the data. The
researcher sought to find a larger meaning of the data beyond the codes and themes. The themes were then organized into a larger abstraction unit to make the data more coherent.

**Trustworthiness**

**Credibility**

Member checks validated themes, test categories, interpretations, and conclusions with the participants (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2010). They were used to verify the data interpretation and its congruence with ensuring interpretive validity. In addition, the participants were provided with transcripts and or summaries of their interviews, if requested, to review and correct any inaccuracies.

**Dependability and Confirmability**

An audit trail provided a transparent description of the steps taken from the start of the research to the reported findings (Simon & Goes, 2011). This step was essential for keeping records and explaining the details of every step of the research (Groenewald, 2004).

**Transferability**

Memoing was conducted by taking field notes and recording all that was heard, seen, and experienced while collecting data and reflecting on the process, ensuring to maintain a balance between reflective and descriptive notes (Groenewald, 2004)

**Ethical Considerations**

The issue of confidentiality and anonymity was addressed by using pseudonyms and was written to prevent the identification of the participants (Walker, 2007). Prior to the start of the study, the potential participants had adequate information regarding the study to make an informed decision on whether they would participate or decline (Walker, 2007). All information
and data were stored on a password-protected laptop. To capture the true essence of how the participants experience the phenomenon, there was a need to bracket out personal experiences as much as possible (Heppner et al., 2015). However, the process of bracketing personal experiences may be considerably tenuous when the interpretations of the data usually include the assumptions of the researcher assumptions on the topic. Therefore, the researcher developed a plan for how the participants’ understandings were introduced and presented in the study.

**Summary**

This study was conducted using a hermeneutic phenomenological design exploring the lived experiences of Black women and the interaction they have with their stylist. The primary form of data collection was one-on-one interviews conducted via the Zoom platform. The datum was used to identify common themes and experiences by the participants. The data were analyzed in several ways, including the transcriptions created by the interviews' zoom platform and the researcher's transcription. This chapter provided the details of the study’s design, participant eligibility and recruitment, the research and interview questions, and the procedures used to conduct the study.
Chapter Four: Findings

Overview

The purpose of the hermeneutical phenomenological study is to examine the lived experience of the interaction between Black women and their stylists in the United States. The participants for this study were selected utilizing purposive sampling to make a deliberate selection of participation based on the characteristics of the participants, their availability, willingness to participate, and their ability to share their experiences and opinions on the subject matter. There were ten participants in this study; the researcher contacted eight eligible participants from various social networks and two through referrals. Participants identified as Black women and were living in the United States. They were of African or Caribbean descent, between the ages of 25-75, have been to the salon at least 15 times in the past two years, and attended the same stylist for a minimum of one year. All participants consented to their participation by completing an informed consent form and scheduling a date and time for an interview.

Data collection occurred using open-ended semi-structured interviews of Black women who regularly attended a Black female stylist for hair care and maintenance services. The interviews were a way to spark a dialogue about the cultural experience of the stylist-client interaction for Black women and how it contributes to their overall well-being. This study helps raise awareness of this phenomenon and the special needs of this population by examining the relationship and benefits aside from achieving a specific hairstyle.

Appraising the lived experience of the stylist-client interaction among Black women is a way to determine if there is a need for a culturally specific outlet for coping with life stressors. This stylist-client interaction is preferred among Black women over speaking with mental health
professionals. In addition, exploring the participants' experiences helped to identify the cultural need. Black women have to engage in mutually beneficial relationships while exercising some control over the discussions that contribute to their management of life stressors. This exploration may ultimately lead to helping service providers for the women of this community address and meet the needs that will contribute to their overall wellbeing.

This chapter will provide the participants' information, collected data, the findings, and include the research questions used to frame the analysis of the study and provide a detailed description of the participants and the results of the interviews. The participants were all Black women who shared their personal experiences while regularly attending a Black female stylist. A verbatim analysis of all participants’ responses was conducted to identify individual perspectives on the stylist-client interaction. Ultimately, qualitative analysis of the interview data through initial observation, audible and visual playback of the interviews, a written transcription of the interviews, in-depth analysis, and synthesis of codes, themes, and subthemes that emerged are presented in this chapter. The findings from the interviews are used to address the main research question:

RQ1: How do Black women describe the cultural aspects of the salon experience?

In addition, the investigation of this research was framed around three additional sub-questions:

SQ1: How do Black women describe their experiences with social supports?

SQ 2: How do Black women describe the overall wellbeing experience of the salon experience?

SQ3: How do Black women describe their experiences when the salons closed during the COVID-19 pandemic?
Participants

There was a total of 10 participants included in this study. The participants were between the ages of 25 and 75 years old and were committed to one Black female stylist to do their hair for at least one year and who had their hair professionally styled at least 15 times in the past two years. The participants represented Black women from different regions of the United States: One participant was from as far West as California, two from the southeast regions of Georgia and Florida, one participant from as far as Northeast as New York state. Two others were from the eastern region in Maryland, three from the south-central region of Texas, and one client who divides her time between Alabama, Mississippi, and Texas. All the participants were identified and recruited through social media, except the two oldest participants. One of the participants was the mother of another participant recruited through social media, and the researcher identified the oldest participant as someone who would meet the criteria. None of the participants were clients or relatives of the clients of the researcher. Additional potential participants were identified; however, the recruitment for participants immediately ceased once saturation was reached.

Each participant was provided with a recruitment email that supplied the study's details and a screening form to confirm that they met the screening criteria. Once each participant was found to be eligible and agreed to the terms of the interview, they consented by signing their names and returning their consent form electronically by email. The potential participants met recruitment for participation with great eagerness, and the total recruitment and interview process took approximately one week to complete.

Description of Participants
Pseudonyms and age ranges have been used to conceal and protect the participants' identities. The following section provides a brief description of the participants.

*Alisha*, recruited from social media, identifies as an African American female who lives in the Mid-Atlantic and Northeastern region of the United States in New York. She is between the ages of 35 to 45. She is an unmarried single mother of one son. She is a government employee. She currently speaks with a mental health provider. She wears her hair naturally, primarily in braids, and has received services from the same stylist for four years.

*Corine*, recruited by the researcher, identifies as an African American female who lives in the Mid-Atlantic eastern region of Maryland. She is between the ages of 65 to 75. She is a widowed mother of two adult daughters. She is retired. She does not speak with a mental health professional. She wears her hair in a straight short but curled hairstyle and has received hair maintenance service with the same stylist for ten years.

*Dayna*, recruited from social media, identifies as an African American female who lives in the Southeastern region of Maryland. She is between the ages of 40 to 50. She is a married mother of two young children. She currently works as a hairstylist. She does not see a mental health professional. She wears her hair in Sisterlocks™ and has been bartering hair services with the same stylist for eight years.

*Julia*, recruited from social media, identifies as an African American female who lives in the Pacific region of the United States in California. She is between the ages of 40-50 years old. She is a widowed mother of two young adult children. She is a Nursing Instructor. She currently speaks with a mental health provider and a life coach. She wears her hair in various hairstylists and has received hair care services with the same stylist for 17 years.
Marcia, recruited from social media, identifies as a Black female of Caribbean descent who lives in the Southeastern region of the United States in Florida. She is between the ages of 35 to 45. She is a married mother of a young adult male. She is a Pastor and a teacher. She currently speaks with a mental health professional. She wears her hair naturally and just recently started wearing her natural hair interlocked. She has received services from the same stylist for 15 years.

Mia, recruited from social media, identifies as an African American female who lives in the Southern region of the United States in Georgia. She is between the ages of 50 to 60. She is engaged and does not have any children. Her profession is undisclosed. She currently speaks with a mental health professional. She wears her natural hair in locs and has received services from the same stylist for approximately four years.

Pamela, recruited from social media, identifies as an African American female who lives in the Southcentral region of the United States. She is between the ages of 45 to 55. Her marital status is undisclosed but indicates that she has children. She is retired military. She does not speak with a mental health professional. She wears her natural hair in locs and has received services from the same stylist for five years.

A referral from Zora, Rose is between 60 and 70. She is divorced and the mother of adult children. She is retired. She does not speak with a mental health professional. She wears her hair in a variety of styles and has been receiving services from the same stylist for 25 years.

Tara, recruited from social media, identifies as an African American female who lives in the Southcentral region of the United States in Texas. She is between the ages of 35 to 45. She is married and has two children. She is a hairstylist. She currently speaks with a mental health
professional. She wears her natural hair in locs and has been bartering services with her hairstylist for three years.

_Zora_, recruited from social media, identifies as an African American female who lives in the United States; and divides her time between Alabama, Mississippi, and Texas. She is between the ages of 40 to 50. She is married with two children. She is employed as a Mental Health Provider and Professor. She currently speaks with a mental health provider. She wears her hair naturally and has seen the same stylist for over ten years to provide hair care services.

**Table 1**

*Profile of Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Preferred Hairstyle</th>
<th>MH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alisha</td>
<td>35-45</td>
<td>NY</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Govt. Employee Retired</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Natural/ Braids</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corine</td>
<td>65-75</td>
<td>MD</td>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Straight/ Short Curl/cut Sisterlocks™</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dayna</td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>MD</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Hairstylist</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Various</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julia</td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>CA</td>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Nursing Instructor Pastor, Educator undisclosed</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Various</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marcia</td>
<td>35-45</td>
<td>FL</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Retired military Retired</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Natural/Lo cs Sisterlocks™</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mia</td>
<td>50-60</td>
<td>GA</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Natural/Lo cs Sisterlocks™</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pamela</td>
<td>45-55</td>
<td>TX</td>
<td>Unspecified</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Natural/ Various Styles Sisterlocks™</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>60-70</td>
<td>TX</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Natural/ Various Styles Sisterlocks™</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tara</td>
<td>35-45</td>
<td>TX</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Hairstylist</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Sisterlocks™</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zora</td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>TX</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Mental Health Provider/ College Professor</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Natural/ Various Styles</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results

Participants were interviewed and asked to answer ten open-ended semi-structured questions to explore their thoughts and experiences about their interaction with the stylists. The questions permitted the participants to introduce themselves, provide deeper insight into their lived experiences with going to the salon, describe their relationship with the stylists, and relate how this interaction contributes to their wellbeing. Participants also shared their experience of not meeting with a stylist during the COVID-19 pandemic. The average time for all interviews was approximately 30 minutes, with none of the interviews requiring a follow-up.

Interviews were recorded using Zoom for audio and video recording; in addition, a backup voice recording using the Voice Memos app on iPhone was used to capture the interview in the event of a loss of connection. A loss of connection occurred during the interview with “Zora”, when the zoom connection was lost; however, we could continue the interview using the audio recording on the iPhone. The interviews were transcribed using word dictation and otter.ai, reviewed by the researcher for accuracy by cross-referencing the transcription document with the recorded interview, and then edited for accuracy using Microsoft word by the researcher. Each code was identified by analysis of the interview questions and responses, and themes and subthemes emerged. The data were hand-coded by the researcher using the transcribed interviews. Each code was identified by analyzing the interview questions and responses, the emerged themes, and subthemes. The participant responses provided for interview Question # 1 partially provided the descriptions for the participants in Table 1. These themes were reviewed against the remaining research questions and theories used in the theoretical framework. Additional questions were asked based on individual responses and the need for elaboration.
The following table reflects the research questions and corresponding interview questions:

### TABLE 2

*Research Questions and Corresponding Interview Questions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research/Sub Question</th>
<th>Corresponding Interview Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RQ1: How do Black women describe the cultural aspects of the salon experience?</td>
<td>2) How would you describe your experiences with going to the stylist?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4) How would you describe your level of commitment to your stylist?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5) How would you describe your experience in the salon aside from getting your hair done?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6) How would you describe the experience of going to the salon as a child?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SQ1: How do Black women describe their experience with social support?</td>
<td>7) How would you describe your relationship with your stylist?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9) How would you describe the experience of speaking to your stylist about personal matters?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SQ2: How do Black women describe the overall wellbeing experience of the salon experience?  

3) How would you describe your feelings when you are unable to make an appointment with your hairstylist?  

8) How would you describe how the environment of the salon factors into your level of comfort with the salon experience?  

SQ3: How do Black women describe their experiences when the salons were closed during the COVID-19 pandemic?  

10) Please describe how maintaining your own hair differed from your hairstyling experiences prior to the COVID-19 pandemic?  

---  

**Theme Development**  

There were four overarching themes to emerge from the data including (1) The identity of Black women is deeply rooted in hair; (2) The foundation of the relationship and commitment between black women and their stylist is built on trust; (3) The client and stylist interaction is not a substitute for professional mental health support; it is a part of the self-care routine for some Black women; and, (4) Stylists play a role in helping their clients navigate life’s challenges. The responses provided for interview Question # 1 was used to provide the descriptions of the participants displayed in Table (1). The responses to interview questions 2-10 will be summarized by theme and displayed in an accompanying table which will provide the supportive quotes from the interviews. The researcher believed it was important to include multiple responses from the same participants where applicable.  

**Theme 1: The Identity of Black Women is Deeply Rooted in Hair**
History of Hairstyling Practices

There is a link between identity and hair for Black women. Hairstyles give some women a sense of self-worth they may not often feel in society (Johnson and Bankhead, 2014). Therefore, the best way to approach addressing the mental health needs of Black women is by first understanding their history (Mbilshaka, 2018). There is a huge burden placed on Black women and their hair starting from the womb, creating a deep-rooted history of Black women of a certain age and the use of hair straightening practices such as the use of hot combs and relaxers. This experience influenced Black women's self-definition and physicality (O’Brien-Richardson, 2019), both of which contribute to identity development (Waterman, 1982). When the participants were asked about their childhood experiences relating to getting their hair done, there was a physical response when some of the participants recalled having their hair straightened. Mia began holding her ears down as she recalled, “Ears burnt with the hot comb from the stove.” Pamela covered her eyes when she recalled getting a perm (relaxer). When asked why she relaxed her hair back, she said: “wanting to fit in.” Marcia also displayed a physical response when asked about her care practices from childhood; she fell back onto the chair, covered her mouth, and began to cry. Although there was pain associated with styling practices, identity development and beauty ideals appear to have made suffering necessary. Further, relationships to include familial, spiritual, and community are important factors in the identity of Black women (Dour et al., 2014).
Table 3

History of Hairstyling Practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Supportive Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alisha</td>
<td>Horrific, because that that straightening comb was… yeah. was rough. around the ears, the nape of your neck, then I got used to it. I had no choice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julia</td>
<td>We all know about the sitting at the stove with the hot comb and having to hold your ear “</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marcia</td>
<td>oh wow, oh that was awful that was not cool…. oh (She fell back in her chair, covered her mouth with her hands and started crying).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mia</td>
<td>Ears (holding ears down) burnt with the comb from the stove the nape of my neck and they call it the kitchen of your neck and my ears were the parts that I didn't like.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pamela</td>
<td>Wanting to fit in. I when I was growing up I was a cheerleader. And so, I had an aunt that said you won't know how to do like their hair. So, I got a relaxer so my hair could do like their hair… the Caucasian people on the cheerleading squad.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiffany</td>
<td>It just jolted me a little, it just jolted me a little because you have permed hair and it would burn your scalp Oh my gosh and I never expected that my gosh. I have no idea where this is coming from. as a child, so I had my hair permed hair very young I was about six, my mommy said, when I permed my hair, when she permed my hair for the first time because my hair was very coarse, and the perms would burn your scalp, burn my scalp, and I would get scabs on my scalp. I remember one particular year, I might have been 14 or 15 and when I was done with the salon and I went home, my mother was freaked out like” what happened to your hair? I was like what happened to my hair, I don't know. Well, I had lost patches on it, it was a nightmare. It was a straight up nightmare. I lost patched on my hair and they never grew back for years. I think I might have been 20-22 when my hair kind of regrew back, and I thought you know what, I’m not going to do this anymore, I’m going to go natural and figure out my life, then I cut it all off.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nurturing Relationships Through Hair

Maternal caregivers set the standard for young African American girls to measure their beauty (Pope et al., 2014). Therefore, to generate a viable data source on the foundational aspects of the relationship between women and their stylists, it's best to start with exploring the
stories about mother-daughter relationships (Wilson et al., 2018). Many participants identified maternal or other familial figures as their first hairstylists; The significance of this sub-theme is that it established a historical background of the relationships between the clients and their current stylists, which will be discussed further. Other mothering is the act of participating in a child's life that is not one’s own, which may occur in either a formal or informal way (Edwards, 2000; James 1993). Women sometimes expand their purview of motherhood beyond their biological relationships to empower their communities (Thomas, 2018). When the emotional needs of children are not met, there is an opportunity for other mothers to step up later in life to help empower them in adulthood. (Mercer, 2016). Alisha identified her grandmother as being her first hairstylist as she recalled memories of her grandmother washing her hair in the kitchen sink, a memory that she laughed at as she responded. Mia recalled having her hair done in the kitchen, but by her mom, Dana, Julia, and Rose, who all remember their mothers as their first stylist. Tara recalled her aunt, who adopted her after her mom died, as her first stylist.
Table 4

Nurturing Relationships Through Hair

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Supportive Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alisha</td>
<td>Um, I really didn't. I didn't go to a salon really, as a child my grandmother did my hair. So, if we’re going to say that it was a salon in her kitchen, where you lay across the kitchen counter (Laughing at the memory), or you get your hair washed in the sink, blow dried in the kitchen chair where you eat dinner, and straightened by the stove.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dayna</td>
<td>So as a child, my mother, pretty much did our hair. So, we really did not go to anyone to do our hair. It wasn't probably until I was in eighth grade, in which my aunt introduced me to the salon.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julia</td>
<td>my mom she gave it a good try I, I have no sisters I just have one brother and he's older so my dad used to say that when I was born my mom was like now I got to figure out how to do hair and so you know she did a really great job of straightening my hair for the first time I can remember also my first experience getting my hair done of course was at the table each day for school and I remember hearing about at school about baby hair's and so I told my mother when time is she's doing my hair one morning that I'd like for her to make sure to get the baby hairs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mia</td>
<td>don't recall going to the salon as a child. My mom did my hair, or she had someone do my hair in the kitchen. So, I didn't I don't recall going to the salon until I was grown and able to pay for my hair myself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>When I was a child, I never went to the salon. My mom was my Stylist, and that is because she had seven daughters. And back then, they couldn’t afford to send seven daughters to the stars. But my mom was a great stylist, and she would flat iron our hair, shampoo would present whatever. And we look great. So, my childhood was good because we never went out the house. With our hair looking bad. It was always done neatly. I didn’t go to a stylist until I was 18 years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tara</td>
<td>My aunt, who adopted me, she did my hair, so I didn’t go to the salon much until I got older.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Relationships Established Through Hair Extends to the Broader Community

Black women are known for being a pillar of support in their communities (Abrams et al., 2019; Dour et al., 2014), and their support can be found throughout the neighborhoods in places such as churches and the beauty shop (Pillay, 2011). In addition, some participants noted that
their stylists were also members of the community and their church families. For example, Julia reflected on a memory from childhood when asked about her first professional stylist “she was again more than just the stylist; she was part of the village.” Likewise, when asked about her current stylist, Julia replied, “she's part of my church family.”

Table 5

*Relationships Established Through Hair Extends to the Broader Community*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Supportive Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alisha</td>
<td>We have a really good relationship. I’ve known her as a kid.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julia</td>
<td>My neighbor across the street from my family home had her own business she worked out of her garage she converted part of it to a salon and so I would go to her hair to her to get my hair done. and it was probably the first time that I got it done in elementary school professionally.” “she was my neighbor she also was the person who would who I have to check in with when I got home from school because she lived across the street so she knew that so part of my routine was to come to get in the house up to call my mom at work to let her know that I was in and then to call my neighbor and let her know and again she was able to look out the window and she knew that if she saw me go in the house and it had been awhile since up and she had received a call she would call me up so she was again more than just the stylist she was part of the village if you will matter fact when I made my mom I think it was like a birthday I think it was a meringue pie or something it was my first time making one and I didn't want to ask my mom cause I was supposed to be a surprise for her so I mentioned it to my neighbor and she was like oh I was like how do you separate the egg yolk and she was like well you know she just said well just come on over and I'll show you how it's done and so we separated the eggs and the whites and the yotes and um so yeah I think um everyone who's done my hair who's been a stylist has had an additional role in terms of being a trusted part of the member of the community in my own village.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julia</td>
<td>We attend the same church and so uhm I think started attending no she attended the church before had joined before my husband passed so she knew my husband she's part of my church family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>I knew her very well, she, the people in the community knew her and she and her husband, my husband was the pastor of a church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>I went to the stylist stand because it was my graduation year. And that's the local stylist in my town at that time, told me that she was going to do my hair as my gift. You know, rather than give me a gift for graduation, she was gonna do my hair. So that was my gift.</td>
</tr>
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Theme 2: The Foundation of the Relationship and Commitment Between Black Women and Their Stylist is Built on Trust

In the African American community, the amount of time spent at the salon often results in trust, loyalty, support, and comfort among stylists and their clients. (Linnan & Ferguson, 2007). Another theme to emerge was trust as the foundation of the relationship between clients and their stylists, which contributed to their commitment to establishing relationships that extend beyond hair. Dayna reflected on not being judged when she stated, “I guess for this stylist, as a professional, um I think because of the person she is, not feeling judged. You know, per se is a, you know, a big difference. You know, feeling, you know, secure and you know, the discussion is likely between you two, versus let's say, the friend or the family who's gonna let the next friend or family know, or you know, that, you know, story changing. And then just talking to someone who may be really isn't invested in the situation. So, you really feel like you're getting the truth; Or, you know, you’re getting, honesty, you know, being provided another way to look at the situation.” Zora stated, "I would describe it as a friendship" not like a friendship where we hang out, but I trust her.” Pamela stated, “So once I find somebody that I feel like I can trust, and I have a connection with them, they stuck with me, I'm not going anywhere.”
Table 6

Trust

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Supportive Quote</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alisha</td>
<td>I just trust her. She gives me good tips for my hair, and it just hasn't failed me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alisha</td>
<td>I trust her because she explains things and takes the time to let me know what is going on.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dayna</td>
<td>Again, my personality I am, you know, always usually pretty guarded. I don't normally share a lot, you know, about myself, let's say with strangers, or just others who didn't say or not family. So, get she is a person who, you know, I can share with and do not feel judged, but know that I'll be offered great advice, even if I don't like, the advice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dayna</td>
<td>I guess for this stylist as a professional, um, I think because of the person she is not feeling judged. You know, per se is a, you know, a big difference. You know, feeling, you know, secure and you know, the discussion is likely between you two, versus let's say, the friend or the family who's gonna let the next friend or family know, or you know, that, you know the story changing. And then just talking to someone who maybe really isn't invested in the situation. So, you really feel like you're getting the truth; Or, you know, you’re getting, honesty, you know, being provided another way to look at the situation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julia</td>
<td>Had had a chance to see her up in other roles in terms of you know at church and I knew that she had known my husband, so she was she was safe I knew then she had my best interest at heart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marcia</td>
<td>She understands me so she doesn't give me these wild outrageous hairstyles and I never had seen I don't like this actually once she said to me you're so easy, you're so easy because you don't really dictate what you want to happen in your hair, and other people she said to me once that a lot of people when they're done and they're looking in the mirror they're checking and their fixing stuff and I never do anything, I won't touch anything, I just pay and leave, and I give her a hug and say see you again next month see you soon and that would be that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pamela</td>
<td>I don't worry about things that I discussed with her getting out to somebody else. There's never been anything that I've disclosed to her. And it came back to me, and this person said, so I don't have any problems sharing and, you know, being my natural self with her, so I don't have to pretend or anything.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>Black women go to black stylist because they know black stylist understand them and their hair texture. They know they will get the best treatment for their hair that they can get.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tara</td>
<td>It's not about money with her she's generally trying to help you and make sure that your hair is taking care of.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tara: I want somebody that's in my head that cares about me that understands me understand this process and that's what I have with her.

Tara: She understands this is your journey and we're doing this together.

Tara: I can't do fake I can't do people who talk about folks here do messiness you know I, I can’t do any of that so I appreciate her being really appreciate her not being messy I appreciate her about talking about this one or that one she don't talk to me about clients.

Tara: I'm very comfortable I don't feel that she will ever betray me as I wouldn’t betray her either and know that she comes from a genuine place because you know this this this this queen has cried you know I'm saying she has broken down she has shared things with me that are intimate you know.

Zora: I would describe it as a friendship" not like a friendship where we hang out, but I trust her.

Zora: She is easy to talk to and I don't feel like whatever I share with her goes beyond that door.

Zora: I'm very committed because as I shared with you before we started, I live between three states and so just recently made that transition between Mississippi and Alabama and I haven't found a stylist in Mississippi or Alabama, so I'll wait until I go back home to Houston and see my stylist there. I have a potential stylists in Mississippi, and I asked my potential stylist to talk to my stylist in Houston to make sure… what’s she saying I trust my stylist to say OK yes let's move forward with her because I work very hard to keep my hair healthy and its natural and so I need someone who is familiar with curing for natural hair and that's not my area of expertise but I do trust my stylist enough to say ‘hey can you talk to the lady and see if this is in line with what you are currently doing or what you were currently suggests?'
### Table 7

**Commitment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Supportive Quote</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alisha</td>
<td>No one's touching my hair but her.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julia</td>
<td>It's really been a long-term relationship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marcia</td>
<td>I'm not going anywhere this is my person.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marcia</td>
<td>Whenever I have to sit in someone else's chair I am not as comfortable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pamela</td>
<td>100% I'm afraid Have habits. So, once I find somebody that I feel like I can trust, and I have a connection with them, they stuck with me, I'm not going anywhere.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tara</td>
<td>I feel like my hair is part of who I am, and I feel like you can’t have just any and everybody in your hair.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tara</td>
<td>If it’s not her doing my hair I don’t know what I would do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tara</td>
<td>I don’t want nobody else; you can’t touch my head.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>Very comfortable, because there have been times, I have just gone up there to visit her to see her and not didn’t have an appointment. And there have been times when I’ve gotten my hair done, and still stayed set around for maybe an hour or two more, and just talk with her or some of the other clients that came in. So fair, comfortable.</td>
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Table 8

*Establishing Deeper Connections*

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<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Supportive Quote</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alisha</td>
<td>I have never heard anything repeated from her. And like I said, we're literally like family although we're not blood related.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corine</td>
<td>I would treat her as if I was talking to my daughter because I have a daughter that age.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dayna</td>
<td>I love her; we're friends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julia</td>
<td>It's really been a long-term relationship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julia</td>
<td>Um almost friends with benefits except not in the way that the world uses the term.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mia</td>
<td>it's almost like finding a boyfriend. You know, like, I don't want to start this process all over again. Because I may not have the same energy and relationship with the next person.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tara</td>
<td>I love her like she’s, my sister.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tara</td>
<td>It’s more than hair, it’s sister hood and I can appreciate that because I don’t have many friends, any people sister so I appreciate the relationship that her and I have.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tara</td>
<td>Even if I want to cut my locs so off we would still have a friendship with still having sister hood so I wouldn’t let that go she’s forever gonna be my sister whether its if I continue down this journey with my hair.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zora</td>
<td>It’s like she’s a part of the family.</td>
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**Theme 3: The Client and Stylist Interaction is not a Substitute for Professional Mental Health Services, it’s part of the Self-Care Routine**

**Self-Care at the Salon**

Self-care is utilized to deal with stressors in life (Black, 2002). It is a practice that involves different activities, including psycho-emotional activities that can potentially impact the health and well-being of individuals (Adkins-Jackson et al., 2019). The atmosphere and the time
clients and stylists spend in the presence of one another help foster a relationship where they mutually feel comfortable speaking on various subjects and personal information. (Johnson et al., 2010). Zora stated, “It provides a more intimate setting for us so that I can share some things that I would not be able to share if there were more people in the room.”

Utilizing the salon as a form of self-care emerged as a theme in which the participants identified stressors and expressed their use of the salon as a safe space for decompression and self-care and seeking help from mental health providers when deemed necessary. Marcia’s responses supported these themes and subthemes. In response to stressors, Marcia stated, “it's relaxing not having my children there, anybody's children there.” About decompression, Marcia stated, “It feels almost like a spiritual experience where you rest and know that the person who is taking care of her know what they're doing, you're comfortable with them.” Marcia’s physical response was juxtaposed when asked about discussing personal issues with her stylist instead of a mental health provider. Marcia explained “I don't tell her personal things because of the hat I wear of being pastor.” She further states, “if I tell her stuff that's close to my heart and then she's going to see my husband another way and I can't really afford that.” Marcia’s husband is also a Pastor.
Establishing a Safe Space

Table 9

Safe Spaces

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Supportive Quote</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Alisha</strong></td>
<td>its privacy, a lot of things we talk about you don't want. I don't want anyone else hang on to be able to go out and share you know, so you know, what we talk about. I know is that it is between us because no one else is there to hear it. That's very important.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Corine</strong></td>
<td>When it's just women we could talk about anything but then there's men and women you have to be careful what you say, sometimes men can take things out of context so out with that is free to say what we want to say we're with women you can joke and laugh and talk about anything and no one is offended.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dayna</strong></td>
<td>So, the one on one, I feel like the respect of time is achieved. Again, the service is based on you. It's not you and breaking off to do you know, a service for you know this person or that person, it's, you know, fairly pretty much, you know, no real interruptions. So, again, you feel focused on.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marcia</strong></td>
<td>You kind of feel like this is about me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marcia</strong></td>
<td>She's fun and friendly and she's always laughing or something or sharing something that happened in the neighborhood and so it's just a great environment for you to be in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marcia</strong></td>
<td>It's relaxing not having my children there anybody's children there.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marcia</strong></td>
<td>Children are great but sometimes they can be whiny or distracting and then when you're talking to another client or another person the in the salon and their attention is divided and so they had to respond to their children's needs when you just want to have that I just wanna have that quiet time to just be among women that I don't really know I don't know.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mia</strong></td>
<td>She is a warm, she's always excited to see me, good spirit person.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mia</strong></td>
<td>Oh, I love it. I love it. We have great chemistry, we have great energy, she has great energy. Um, I think that's very important when you pick a stylist that you gel with.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pamela</strong></td>
<td>But it's always a good experience, because the other ladies that are in the salon also, are all very friendly. We all talk, you know, we know about each other's families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pamela</strong></td>
<td>It’s good, it’s very comforting and relaxing because you know, it gives us more things to talk about because whatever we’ll watch and if something happens and we can relate it to our own personal lives or something that’s going on in the world, we’ll pause it and have a discussion about it and then keep on going so and the fact that if we start something and once my appointment is done then we</td>
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</table>
stop and then six to eight weeks later we pick back up with that same thing it’s like we don’t miss a beat just keep going.

Rose Black women don’t want to appear as being weak in any way, mentally, physically, spiritually, emotionally, we don’t want to appear to be weak, because we have had to be strong for so long. And the strength we’ve had to gather and have comes a lot from having to be single mom, single parents, and are your parents, you have to take care of your parents, you had to grow up fast because your parents was ill or something like that. And so because we have bought into the fact that we have to always be strong, that we can’t show weakness. This is what makes it difficult for us to set that.

Rose I prefer one on one.

Rose She’s very, very kindhearted. She’s very personable. She has a great spirit. You know, her spirit is just it’s the kind of spirit you want to be around, you know, positive, everything.

Tara It's just one person so I ain't gotta deal with too many conflicting personalities too many conflicted you know spirits anything like that I just deal with this one individual.

Tara When it’s just you and that person, you get to feel who that person is.

Tara I don’t prefer to be in an environment where there’s a bunch of women and men…it’s just not my preference.

Zora My preference would be when I currently have, so just me and the stylist with you know some overlap one another customer but being in a big salon or not necessarily a salon with multiple stylist and multiple customers I'm not really a fan of that.

Zora It provides a more intimate setting for us so that I can share some things that I wouldn't be able to share if there was more people in the room.
Table 10

A Place to Decompress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Supportive Quote</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Alisha</strong></td>
<td>I will say it probably started in my 30s when I began to feel more comfortable with myself, wearing different styles. I'm just really becoming more confident and honestly, who I am as a woman and not being so much on. So, I say that not based on parents, but finding different things where I feel I can enhance myself. Um, it just makes me feel good inside and it's not for anybody else. It's for me. So I think when I really discovered it It started discovering who I was as a woman. It was what I like in and the treat to myself. Um, yeah, I will say came in my 30s when I started, like really understanding who I was what I wanted, what direction I want to go on life and what I was gonna allow and not allow in my life. So that hair time, it's like my me time where it's some people, they'll go out and buy this and buy that and go shopping and do this and do that. It's kind of like okay, my hair time. That's my day want to get my hair done, and it makes me feel good.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Alisha</strong></td>
<td>I can tell you I feel different when it's not together. Um, I feel like I don't want to do anything. I don't want I don't leave the house. I just feel like bland like, like, I don't Yeah, I don't have really any motivation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Alisha</strong></td>
<td>I gotta keep my hair together. Like, it just brings out your face, it just, to me, it does something for you. Like it doesn't have to be to have some little fuzzies around the edges. You can slick them things down. But my hair has to be done. Like you never know what's gonna occur where I'm gonna have to go. It needs to be in something where I can just get up and just go and I'm able to go.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Corine</strong></td>
<td>It makes you feel good that your hair is done you know that your hair looks good, you know and you know when you walk out the door I mean somebody is complementing you before you get to the you know to the car, where when somebody said you know will say miss your hair looks so good so you do get compliments you know.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Corine</strong></td>
<td>Salon it's a place of I guess so relief, release. because you sit there you just talked to other women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Julia</strong></td>
<td>It's part of myself care routine so it's more than simply you know an appointment it's, it's when my husband was sick shortly before he passed, he umm, I remember him saying up and so did my stylist at the time they were both like make sure you keep your appointments, keep going because they both recognize how again it was more than simply the cosmetic part but it was an opportunity to practice some self-care, even before we knew what that term meant.</td>
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</table>
Marcia: I feel like I can just sit and think my own thoughts and process an article that I just read, or I can talk or not talk.

Marcia: It feels almost like a spiritual experience where you rest and know that the person who is taking care of her know what they're doing, you're comfortable with them.

Marcia: I'm also a teacher and the pastor and it's important to me to maintain my sense of well-being as well as to feel good about the way and look where present myself to the world is important to me and I want to show the way I feel on the inside and black woman with natural hair living in the United states an immigrant I sometimes think that there is a look that is more acceptable than others are there looks and I tried to be true to myself and the still look acceptable for an environment which I work so my hair and my makeup is important to me.

Mia: It's my pampering time for myself. I'm not a mani/pedi person, so the only I'm not gonna say the only grooming, but one of the main grooming things that I do is get my hair done. And I don't do anything else to my hair any other time. So, when that six week or whatever comes around, I'm ready. And nothing within my control actually stops it.

Mia: We've talked about, about my life, she sometimes has good ideas or suggestions or is able to talk me off the ledge.

Pamela: So, it's just something about, something about this hair, and you know, having that done and having it looking good. It can change your whole mindset, your whole attitude, everything. So you go to that salon, you might go in feeling a-way, but you come out like a totally different person. So yeah, you, right; you go in and get straightened out. literally or figuratively.

Tara: It's actually, relaxing, it's liberating I feel very comfortable.

Tara: I need to release some things and she gets to release some things.

Zora: My mom went every week, so it was kind of instilled in me that that's a necessary portion of taking care of yourself.

Zora: When I go to a salon, that's my self-care day, so and I don't wanna sit there all day when I have a massage scheduled or when I have some quiet time scheduled or if I have a movie schedule.

Zora: Just based on my experiences in those environments it's not as intimate as I will prefer so a little bit more loud and I would prefer so when so it doesn't provide the means of escaping that are typically when are we getting my hair done as a
form of self-care for me is one of my things that I do for self-care and if I have too much going on around me that's not selfcare for me.

**Zora**

It’s my place to like let it all out.
## Table 11

*Seeking Professional Mental Health Treatment*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Supportive Quote</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Alisha</strong></td>
<td>More professional, she gives me more different tools to use, that I can apply in a professional basis, versus talking to my stylist is definitely more personal. She does understand me more on a cultural level. Or some things what my mental health counselor I have to explain, which I don't mind, because it's a cultural difference. But it's more of a cultural thing, why I have to explain it to my mental health counselor,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Alisha</strong></td>
<td>I see a mental health professional biweekly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Alisha</strong></td>
<td>I have a therapist that I talked to with about my personal issues yeah, I that's who I don't talk to others they don't talk today mom my sister too much anymore I’m used to but it a bad idea.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dayna</strong></td>
<td>It's very necessary. I do think sometimes talking to a professional give you a different way of being an inch versus not talking to someone who's just going to say what you want them to hear, or you know, because maybe they have an inside scoop.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Julia</strong></td>
<td>I do both I have and interestingly enough I see them on the same day, also I meet regularly with a life coach.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Julia</strong></td>
<td>She’s not she doesn’t have the same wisdom um as my life coach does she has never been married nor a parent and sometimes some of the things so so I keep that in mind when I’m looking to people for advice or or things like that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marcia</strong></td>
<td>If I tell her stuff that's close to my heart and then she's going to see my husband another way and I can't really afford that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marcia</strong></td>
<td>I don't tell her personal things because of the hat I wear of being pastor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mia</strong></td>
<td>Okay. So, I don't think there's anything that I could talk that I will talk to my stylists about that I wouldn't talk to my therapist.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mia</strong></td>
<td>Now seeing a therapist just gives me peace of mind and, and an objective outlet for some other things that may be going on in my life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mia</strong></td>
<td>That I think anything that I think will be embarrassing to my fiancé, anything that I don't think that he would want anybody else to know. Um, financial, I think is off limits. Unless it has to do with me paying her or I can't pay you right then. And she wants me to still be on schedule. That's not off limits, but anything about my bills or anything like that? Um, that's all I can think of right now. Um, that's all I can think of right now. Any financial situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mia</strong></td>
<td>Oh, the things that I discuss with my consultant are not the same thing that I discussed with my therapist at all. They're just different, because although I do have a couple of friends that I confide in and ask for their opinion, the therapist</td>
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</table>
knows some of the deepest darkest things that I would probably be embarrassed to tell my consultant.

**Pamela**

I do have a couple of friends who are social workers and psychologists, things like that. So, it wouldn't bother me if I felt like I really needed to talk to someone and I wouldn't hesitate. I'd do it.

**Rose**

Mental health professionals are needed, just like doctors and lawyers are needed. Just like, whatever else, you have to people, you have to go to their needs as well. We have physical ailments; we have mental ailments. To be perfectly honest, I think everybody in the world has some kind of mental illness, regardless to whether they admit it or not. And a physical doctor is not going to be able to help you with your mental illness. So, I don't have any problem with them talking to them.

**Tara**

My stylist is more understanding more empathetic.

**Tara**

My stylist understands and um agrees with how I feel or the in the biblical standpoint how our marriage should be I'm not saying that my therapist doesn't understand where I'm coming from in the biblical standpoint but I do know that she truly believes just let him do what he does and don't worry about his finances.

**Zora**

Because of the frequency in which I see her, we talk about any and everything right, whatever happened the in the days prior me catching her up on my life and her catch me up on what ever happened between the time that I saw her the week before or two weeks before and then when my next appointment is right, whereas, with the therapist when I'm seeking out a therapist because I'm seeking out with the intention of helping to resolve whatever the issue is and I, I want more professional guidance and that and that outlook versus ham visiting to a friend.

**Zora**

I had a therapist before and because I am a therapist, I definitely believe that I think there it offers a mutual person with no bias right cause sometimes relationships can't get foggy the perspective from that from that relationship can be foggy and I think having a counselor or therapist helps minimize the potential for that.

---

**Theme 4: Stylists Play a Vital Role in Helping Their Clients**

**Navigate Life’s Challenges**

One of the themes from the responses was that the stylists and clients experience mutual empathy based on shared experiences. Black women tend to carry various burdens, which includes: (a) the fear of losing their children, (b) economic stress, (c) feelings of being tired and drained, and (d) the perceptions of service providers being ineffective (Copeland & Snyder,
Some of the participants provided various examples of how they often communicate with their stylists about these shared experiences. Alisha stated, “My stylist, she just gets it because we're of the same culture. We've had a lot of the same experiences.”. One of the most recent and major life challenges was the COVID-19 pandemic. The participants shared their experiences and how they impacted the client and stylist relationship.
Table 12

_Mutual Empathy Based on Shared Experiences_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Supportive Quote</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alisha</td>
<td>Relationships, children are children, there's a big gap in the age difference. She has little children under the age of three. I have an 18-year-old so I can tell her kind of what to expect. She's a single mom, I was a single mom. So, we relate on a lot of different issues that I've been through that I see her probably going through as a single mother. I offer her resources, referrals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alisha</td>
<td>My stylist, she just gets it because we're of the same culture. We've had a lot of the same experiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pamela</td>
<td>The time that I'm in the chair, is, yes, I'm getting my hair done. But that's, that's quality time. That's quality time because we have shared interest. We're talking about, we're not just talking about surface things we're talking about, you know, sometimes major things, heavy things, important things. So, it's just the whole thing of professionalism. We can, you know, laugh, talk, joke, whatever, but it's still a professional experience all around.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pamela</td>
<td>Um, I think we probably shared a few personal things you know, nothing too in depth, but I've probably gotten some good advice from her on some life experiences and things and because we both have teenage daughters, so we have that shared experience and so we share things about them and parenting tips and stuff like that. So, it's there's a comfort level is there. So, there’s no you know, discomfort.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pamela</td>
<td>I always have a great experience. Because we have a shared interest. She was prior military as well. And then we both retired within months of each other.” And she started her Sisterlocks™ you know, she went to the training and everything. And I was her first client. So, it's been a good, good relationship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>We can discuss personal matters. We both have some things right now that are personal, personable, but they’re also common to both of us. We’re both having to go through the same thing. So, it’s easy to discuss those things with each other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>We discuss family, we discuss church, we discuss God, we discuss children and grandchildren, we discuss school, whatever is going on in the world at the time was politics or whatever we agree or disagree. We’re discussing. It just ended everything I will conversations are not limited. They are respectable, but they’re not that limited.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tara</td>
<td>Things going on in her marriage and things were going on in my marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tara</td>
<td>I was particularly going through something with my son on last year where he was just doing himself being a teenager 19 and he was being disobedient you know out here hanging out with his friends smoking weed and as a mom I was concerned my spirit was vexed, that was hurt I was hurt because you know I'm the one seen here supporting you item one out here busting my butt to make sure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I can provide for everything and you’re just out here just being disobedient and I was scared you know and she had actually shared with me that she has a son and I didn't know this at the time that is actually incarcerated, incarcerated for murder incarcerated because he was hanging with the wrong people at the wrong time making bad choices and because of the bad choices that he made he's in jail now and I believe he's in jail for life

**Tara**  We talk so much we share so much with crying together.

**Tara**  We laugh together

**Tara**  We talk about what goes on in our lives, it’s just more personal

**Tara**  The fact that we have this type of relationship I value it I, I love it you know and I would be hurt if the relationship was to ever dissolve in any shape form of fashion because I look at her as someone that I can look up to and then I can talk to and I can confide and there will be no judgment.

**Tara**  She’s helped me through some stuff even with my marriage.

**Zora**  So, we talk about work so some in my prior job before I resigned. If I had a frustration, then I would discuss those things with her family marriage kids all of those components we talk about just life and so.

**Zora**  Beyond the religious and political and just the commonality's and how we choose to raise our kids and we just connect you know there are many levels.

**Zora**  If there has been a hiccup in my family or with the kids and I'm talking to her about it she's had a hiccup in her family with the kids she's talking to me about it, so there's a dialog versus just going for a you know service and then leaving.

Black women are expected to be caretakers for their families and in the community and rarely express a need for help out of fear that they may be perceived as weak or vulnerable (Jones et al., 2020). As a result, they must work harder to maintain a balance of work-life obligations and responsibilities, often without the assistance and support of others (Bronder et al., 2014). The participants expressed how they support the opportunity of being vulnerable with one another in the salon environment. This leads to another subtheme to emerge: the client and stylist are mutual support systems for one another. Several participants in this study have shared experiences where they have provided mutual support in providing acts of service for one
another outside of the salon. These services ranged from phone calls to assisting family members. Julia says, ‘I get lots of support.’ Stylists and clients advise one another. Alisha says, “I enjoy talking to my stylist. She enjoys talking to me. And yeah, we talk about different things. I'd get perspectives from her about things that's going on in my life. And I'm able to offer her advice as well.”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Supportive Quote</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alisha</td>
<td>It's actually relaxing to me because I enjoy talking to my stylist. She enjoys talking to me. And yeah, we talk about different things. I'd get perspectives from her about things that's going on in my life. And I'm able to offer her advice as well. She's younger than me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dayna</td>
<td>We have a great relationship. You know, it's the person that I can organically speak to, you know, a vice versa. mentorship. It's funny, because she's also a social counselor, social worker. So sometimes, you know, just in a speaking that might get a different totally different insight, you know, about something out, you know, that was going on, you know, maybe a way that I didn't think about it before.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mia</td>
<td>I share things that I might not have shared to anyone else or that I feel comfortable sharing with her, like I do with other people, with my other friends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pamela</td>
<td>Where I go, there’s three different women in there. And they are all so supportive. And if I’ve mentioned something to my stylist, and she, like, you know, I don’t know, if she’ll call the other lady in there. And, you know, we share advice and experiencing experiences. So, on the outside of that, I was still feel like, you know, still feel comfortable contacting her saying, Hey, what do you think about this? And then she doesn’t know, then she’ll contact next person to say, hey, what do you think about this? It’s like, they’re always trying to lift each other up. Now outside of that, it’s like, they’re not they’re the same people outside of the salon that they are in the salon. So, you know, they not in the salon being let me just act this way. Cause you here and you’re paying me or whatever. Is they the same thing inside as they are outside of the salon? So, I think that’s good. As far as other people, other women. I don’t know.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pamela</td>
<td>For me, is enlightening, because I can see and I get to hear someone else’s point of view. And think about things that okay, maybe I didn’t look at it that way. Or if something is going on in my life. Say for instance, just as an example, if I’m bickering with maybe my best friend or whatever, and I talked to my stylist about it, then maybe she can help me see it from a different perspective. So, I always come out. Feeling like I’ve learned something, I’ve gained something from that conversation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pamela</td>
<td>We have a very good relationship, I would, if I needed advice on something, and I felt like she could give me a good word, then I wouldn’t hesitate to contact her or reach out to her. And I’ve done that before. So, we have a very good relationship that goes beyond her, you know, taking care of my locs.</td>
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Rose  We can ask them questions openly and not be ashamed or afraid to ask the questions.

Tara  She’s older than me, not by many years but she’s older than me and so I feel that everybody experienced something different in life and it helps me to not lean on my own understanding you know um and to get it you know from her because she’s been married longer number one, her son is older number her kids are older number two, so not saying that you know I’m always open and willing to learn you know I don’t know everything so yeah I will go to her in a heartbeat and definitely get her out put on her input on whatever it is that I may be going through or whatever the case may be yeah without a shadow of a doubt.

Tara  She said: don’t ever give up on your son continue talking to him you know you keep doing what you’re supposed to do as a parent in may I continue talking to my son and I continued to pray and eventually I did Let go eventually he did move out even they were for Mother’s Day this year actually and he’s actually doing pretty good.

Zora  So with her I feel like whenever I share with her like I said it won't go beyond when I walk out of the door I trust that she has not best interest at heart when she shares things with me in terms of giving me feedback on maybe something I'm sharing with her and trust that she has she's gonna do right by me and my hair because she knows how important it is to me it shows that she knowledgeable of her field to where I post questions to her about something that I've noticed different in my hair the texture of it or something like that that she's either going to saying I mean sure we look into it or this is what I believe.
### Table 14

**Mutual Support Systems**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Supportive Quote</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Julia</strong></td>
<td>All my stylists have it’s more than just a professional relationship so again the fact that today my stylist went to go pick up my mom for me. She used to her salon used to be walking distance from the adult center where my mom goes Monday through Friday so um again it’s more than simply transactional kind of thing you know she’s having a birthday party next month and I’m gonna be there to support her so yeah.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Julia</strong></td>
<td>She’s great in terms of I’ll pick you up at the airport which I need sometimes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Julia</strong></td>
<td>I get lots of support when go she was it was this time I exactly today in 2012 that um I was at a research fellowship on the East Coast, and um, what happened, and my daughters were in a wedding here in California and so I couldn’t really leave to come back and forth to, to have them go so my stylist let me know you know what do you need and, and she offered to get my daughters, do their hair, because they were in the wedding take them to the ceremony and then also drop them off at the airport later that day so they they’ve always been just really supportive of me beyond just my hair.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marcia</strong></td>
<td>I’m texting her at times when I don't need your appointment just saying how you doing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marcia</strong></td>
<td>During COVID my stylist, she lost her mom not related to COVID, but during that time and so we were there with her and she got to move her salon cause Covid was just a really awful nightmare because so she rented a chair in the salon that salon closed and so I said come over, or what do you want us to do now?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rose</strong></td>
<td>Yeah, it is preferred for me, it is good. Like I say, I’ve been going with her to her over 25 years now. And I, when she got married, I was invited to a wedding. She had baby showers; I went to those. My daughter got married, and I’ve had other things that happen in my life that she’s attended. So yeah.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rose</strong></td>
<td>It’s a great relationship. It’s a really great relationship because she contacts me outside of being enough. And I can talk to her outside of being in the shop. And sometimes when she gets off work, she will call me because she lives. She used to live in the same city with me. But now she lives in a city that’s like 20-25 miles from here. So she drives back in every day. So sometimes when she gets off, for sure, call me, and we’re talking all the way to her home. So, it’s just not just a stylish client relationship, we have, like a friendship.</td>
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</table>
**Tara**  
She would be the second person that will run to so she God is the first person; she comes after God.

---

**Shared Spiritual/Religious Beliefs and Practices**

Members of the Black community often rely heavily on religious coping (Hays, 2015) and many faith-based interventions like scripture and prayer, which provide a sense of deeper connection and reasoning behind developing and engaging in healthy behaviors (Palmer et al., 2020). Other forms of social support including, engaging with extended family or religious communities, have been shown to soften the blows of general stress responses among Black women (Wyatt et al., 2003). Another sub-theme to emerge was shared spiritual and religious beliefs and practices between the client and stylist. Zora stated that prayer is shared between her and her stylist even outside of the salon “She and I will still like text and just say hey I'm thinking about you or I’m praying for you or something like that and we still stay connected.”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Supportive Quote</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Julia</strong></td>
<td>“She also prayed the first time that I got a weave I had never worn a weave before, and I was very reluctant. I remember growing up I didn't want to get my hair pressed for a very long time because in elementary school the girls that I saw that either had perms or had their hair pressed it, it wasn't flattering uhm it, it you know and so it took a lot of trust to be able to agree to a are we and she also prayed before that cause I was concerned I was like you know I don't want to have the edge is gone and all those other things and so she was really sensitive to those concerns and even prayed before we started the weave process.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Julia</strong></td>
<td>“after my husband had passed years later, um, I had been set up on a blind date and, um, the first blind date I think that I had did not go well and, and he was not easy on the eyes and so it's almost like that one didn't count, so when the second one came up it was with someone I showed her a picture and we were both by he's not bad looking, and so I remember her saying before she did my hair for the day, um that she just took a moment and pray with me and for me”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mia</strong></td>
<td>“My stylist lives about 30 miles from me, but I drive because of our energy.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tara</strong></td>
<td>“everybody's energy is different everybody spirit is different, and I feel like some people have hands of God and you got some people who got hands of evilness”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tara</strong></td>
<td>“I am a spiritual person so I can feel your spirit…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tara</strong></td>
<td>&quot;The older I get, there more I appreciate the spiritual side of things&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Zora</strong></td>
<td>“We have similar religious beliefs right her feedback to me is oftentimes from that perspective and versus someone who may not believe what I believe or don't believe it all don't give me a perspective from a different outlook and sometimes I need to be reminded but what Bible says cause I I go away from it and so she kind of brings it into perspective”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Zora</strong></td>
<td>“She and I will still like text and just say hey I'm thinking about you or I’m praying for you or something like that and we still stay connected”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Impact of the COVID-19 Related Salon Shutdowns

The COVID-19 mitigation efforts that caused the salon shutdowns due to social distancing restrictions impacted the safety net and social structures of the Black community (Moore et al., 2020). The expression of the impact was the final theme to emerge from the research. Participants shared about their relationship with their stylist and their views concerning hair. Rose stated, “I missed, missed that, and missed the conversations I would have had with her in the shop. But we still talked on the phone, you know, so I wasn’t lost but you miss from looking good. You know, you got your stylist and if they know what they’re doing, they’re gonna have you looking really nice when you leave out of there. So, you miss that. Okay. And you miss getting the compliments because when you walk out of that shop, man, who did your hair, your hair is so pretty. I like that style. You missed the compliments, you know”.
Table 16

Reflections from the COVID-19 salon shutdowns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Supportive Quote</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alisha</td>
<td>“And then my stylist, she took a chance if she came, she was like, well, who am I? Because I begged her. She came to my house that actually braided my hair. But she was like, suited up an astronaut suit, mask, everything. So, it started back shortly after COVID hit two image honestly, my, like, it was like, you know, when I did have to run to the store, I was trying to best look at one and don't call the months, she came into my house looking like an astronaut and braiding my hair. Um, (why was that worth the risk for you) image honestly, my, like, it was like, you know, when I did have to run to the store, I was trying to best looking one at the store. What? Yo, yeah, my hair is just like, oh, gosh, like something has to be done. I can't continue to order these scars off Amazon. Like, every day. It's like a whole different look, I need something like, from routine that I'm used to.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corine</td>
<td>“Kyra (her daughter) keeps saying well you might as well cut it all off, I said I don’t like cutting my hair all so it was a little unfair, you know I just couldn’t wait you know like when I can go to the hairdresser which and I go so it was it was a little trying time.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dayna</td>
<td>“Most of my consultants communication is, you know, during our visits, so, you know, it's still different, though, we may not pick up the phone and call all the time. Yes, I can depend on, you know, those monthly appointments at the time that we can communicate.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julia</td>
<td>“my mom lives with me and she’s in her 80s and I go to the hospital as part of my job as a nursing instructor I realized that we were really at additional risk so I just stopped trying to see here out of an abundance of caution for my mom and myself as well as my students and patients because if I were to test positive I don’t have a substitute that cover my classes so it would mean that my students would miss out on their clinical hours and just understanding the ripple effect so anyway I chose not to go but the first couple of months I just continued to send her since my income had not changed and going to see her regularly was already budgeted I continued to send her a check for my usual amount and then after a couple months”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julia</td>
<td>“I’ve not had a break from caregiving since like a full day of caregiving since February of 2020 so there were lots of hits for me I know for some people it was a time when they got a chance to really you know sit and have a moment and reflect on all of those really great things and bake bread for me it meant my already full plate in life was now I was doing it with no safety net no support”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Marcia “as a teacher I had to do virtual classes and it was uncomfortable to show my face if I didn't have my hair on, so it was important for me to still feel comfortable and then I said; OK ,this is me this is where I am, I will not need these wigs, I’m wearing my hair the way it is, and not keep looking forward to how my hair could be ,like what is actual and what is expected are two different things and I'm waiting for the expected and while I wait for the expected outcome I will cover my hair, and I’m not covering it anymore”

Tara “Taught you to value other stuff other than your hair”

Tara “I’m a little bit more flexible and more understanding now, now versus before and it may be because of you know the pandemic has happened and it has taught me to be patient and just basically wait.”

Tara “It didn’t bother me because there was so much other things that were um yeah important then getting my hair done; so, my focus was on other stuff making sure that my family was safe you know making sure that we had all the information we needed about the pandemic so it wasn’t really a factor to me didn’t bother me”

Pamela “We communicated through text”

Rose “I missed, missed that and missed the conversations I would have had with her in the shop. But we still talked on the phone, you know, so I wasn’t lost but you miss from looking good. You know, you got your stylist and if they know what they’re doing, they’re gonna have you looking really nice when you leave out of there. So, you miss that. Okay. And you miss getting the compliments because when you walk out of that shop, man who did your hair, your hair is so pretty. I like that style. You missed the compliments, you know”

Zora “We would check on one another but I was doing my own hair”

Summary

This study was constructed utilizing a qualitative approach to understand the lived experience of those who have regular stylist-client interaction. This study was designed to understand the benefits this interaction has on Black women in the United States and determine if the client and stylist interaction is being utilized as a culturally specific form of coping with stress. A minimum of 10 open-ended semi-structured questions were asked for interviews. The
Data collected provided a hermeneutical description and created an opportunity for themes and subthemes to emerge that answered the research questions and sub-questions. Despite the researcher’s role as both a stylist and a client, the research remained unbiased throughout the process as she listed, recorded, and reported the participants' lived experiences.

Participants were willing to engage with the researcher on this topic and share their personal experiences. The following themes emerged as a result: (1) The identity of Black women is deeply rooted in hair; (2) The foundation of the relationship and commitment between black women and their stylist is built on trust; (3) Stylists play a role in helping their clients navigate life’s challenges; and, (4) The client and stylist interaction is not a substitute for professional mental health support, it is a part of the self-care routine for some Black women.

The research revealed that the client-stylist interaction is a culturally specific form of coping with stress for Black women. While practicing hair maintenance, this form of communication was established in the homes of many black women as a time for bonding with their mothers and other familial figures in the family and the community. The bonds established by the stylists and clients go beyond the chair. These women have shared how they develop friendships and bonds as they support one another by being a listening ear, sharing advice, and providing acts of service for one another. Although the client-stylist interaction is not a preferable method of managing stress for black women, instead of going to a mental health professional, it is a part of their self-care routine and contributes to their wellbeing. The participants of this study expressed how, although hair is very important to them, the COVID-19 related salon shutdowns helped them reflect on the most important things in their lives. To sum it up best, the salon is a safe space, providing an atmosphere where Black women can straighten each other’s crowns without telling the world they were ever crooked.
Chapter Five: Conclusion

Overview

The purpose of this study is to bring an awareness of the use of going to the hair salon as one way of coping with stress for Black women by examining the relationship the clients have with their stylist and the value placed on being able to share personal experiences. Qualitative research methods were utilized to ensure that the lived experiences of Black women in the United States were captured. Themes emerged from analyzing the data collected from the ten semi-structured interview questions answered by the ten participants in this study via Zoom. This chapter presents a summary of findings, the results of the research questions, a discussion of the findings, the implications per relevant literature, delimitations, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

This study explored the lived experiences of ten Black women in the United States and their relationships with their stylists. Using a phenomenological approach allowed four overarching themes to emerge (1) The identity of Black women is deeply rooted in hair; (2) The foundation of the relationship and commitment between black women and their stylist is built on trust; (3) Stylists play a role in helping their clients navigate life’s challenges; and, (4) The client and stylist interaction is not a substitute for professional mental health support, it is a part of the self-care routine for some Black women. These themes revealed that the cultural experience of the client and stylist interaction would be based on: (1) Interpersonal relationships, stemming from an act of service between the stylist and client; (2) Intrapersonal relationships, developed through shared experiences resulting in similar shared beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and behaviors; and, (3) establishing relationships to the broader community. These themes helped
answer the primary research question and the three sub-research questions. This study also revealed areas that would be recommended for future research.

**Research Questions and Responses**

The participants revealed that the client and stylist relationship is about more than hair for Black women. It is a space for Black women to be vulnerable enough to express themselves without the fear of judgment or appearing weak and support one another. During the interviews, Pamela summed it up most appropriately when she said about the salon, “It’s a place where Black women can adjust each other’s crowns, without telling the world it was crooked.”

*Research Question One: How do Black women describe the cultural aspects of the salon experience?*

The primary research question of this study was: How do Black women describe the cultural aspects of the salon experience? The following themes and subthemes emerged: (1) The identity of Black women is deeply rooted in hair; (2) The foundation of the relationship and commitment between black women and their stylist is built on trust; (3) The client and stylist interaction is not a substitute for professional mental health support, it’s a part of the self-care routine for some Black women; and, (4) Stylists play a role in helping their clients navigate life’s challenges; and,

The cultural experience for Black women and their hair starts at home, often in the kitchen, with their first stylists being their mothers or caretakers. It is an opportunity for Black women to bond with women in their families and the broader community. Julia recalled how the first woman to do her hair outside of her mother was her neighbor. This neighbor was also the woman whom the participant had to call every day after school and make sure she arrived in the house safely. This is the woman whom Julia turned to when her mother was not around to
provide direct care. Julia also shared that her current stylist is a member of her church, who helped her with her children when her husband died. She referred to her childhood stylists and current stylist as part of her Village.

Black women need to seek out stylists they can trust.

Dayna shared,

Again, my personality I am, you know, always usually pretty guarded. I don't normally share a lot, you know, about myself, let's say with strangers, or just others who didn't say or not family. So get she is a person who, you know, I can share with and do not feel judged, but know that I'll be offered great advice, even if I don't like, the advice.

Black women desire to have a stylist who knows the cultural experience. They desire someone who will listen to them, talk to them, and pray for them when necessary. Julia recalled her stylist taking time to pray for her the first time she was getting a weave sown in her hair. The black stylist understood that this was more than just a weave for her client; this was associated with some deep-rooted trauma, and the experience triggered an anxious response for Julia. She prayed for her, an act deeply rooted in the Black cultural experience, which subsequently is a part of the cultural experience for Black women in the salons.

Sub Question 1: How do Black women describe their experience with social support?

The first sub-question for this research was: How do Black women describe their experience with social support? The following theme emerged: The foundation of the relationship and commitment between black women and their stylists is built on trust.

Participants described trust as the number one factor for committing to their stylist. However, Mia stated that there are some limits to what some stylists are willing to share with their clients. When asked what those topics were for her, Mia stated, “I think anything that I
think will be embarrassing to my fiancé, anything that I don't think that he would want anybody else to know. Um, financial, I think is off-limits.” Even with these limits in place, Mia also shared that she entrusted her stylist with other things in their life; she is the person she referred to as one who could “talk her off the ledge.”

Julia admitted that she does not completely trust sharing personal information with her stylist. However, her stylist is her number one support system, who helped her with her children after her husband died and currently helps her with her aging and ailing mother. Therefore, she trusts her to be an extension of herself when she cannot be there with her family, as mentioned in Sieber and Herreman (2000). Tiffany may have summed it up best when she referred to her stylist as being her “person.” Moreover, although Julia’s stylist may be her “person,” because she has not had certain experiences in life, she is not the person Julia goes to for advice. Julia stated,

She's not (she appeared uncomfortable and hesitant as she struggled to finish), she doesn't have the same wisdom um as my life coach does, she has never been married nor a parent and sometimes some of the things so, so I keep that in mind when I'm looking to people for advice or, or things like that.

In accordance with the participants' accounts, this level of trust is established through the professionalism and character of the stylist, creating the foundation of commitment between the stylist and client. Many participants expressed that, because of the professionalism of the stylist, they did not worry about anything they shared with the stylist being repeated outside of their relationship.

Zora stated
She is easy to talk to and I don't feel like whatever I share with her goes beyond that door, because I don't get that, and nor does my family get that when they're sitting in her chair either.

Rose added,

She doesn't tolerate people in their gossiping, saying mother thing using profanity, nothing like that you have to be professional when you're in there. At least. If you're not saying anything, you need to sit there and be quiet or whatever. She doesn't tolerate a lot of foolishness. She doesn't want drama in her shop.

The support between the stylist and the clients is mutual. The participants of this study shared experiences and leaned on each other for support that often extends outside the salon.

Rose shared

It's a great relationship. It's a really great relationship because she contacts me outside of being enough. And I can take her outside of being in the shop. And sometimes when she gets off work, she will call me because she lives. She used to live in the same city with me. But now she lives in a city that's like 20-25 miles from here. So she drives back every day. So sometimes when she gets off, she will call me, and we're talking all the way to her home. So, it's just not just a stylist client relationship, we have, like a friendship”

Stylists and their clients supported one another in their marriages, raising their children, and during COVID, when hair was the least of their concerns. Through these shared experiences, the participants learned how to trust their stylist's advice. Tara recalled how she was having an issue with her son, and she was afraid for him. When she confided in her stylist about the concerns, she had with her son. Her stylist then shared how her own son was currently incarcerated for murder with her client. Tara shared the advice that her stylist gave, which was, “don't ever give up on your son continue talking to him, you know you keep doing what you're
supposed to do as a parent.” Tara shared that she “took her stylist's advice and continued talking to and praying for her son; as a result, she was happy to admit that her son is now “doing pretty good.”

As a result of her experiences, Tara refers to her stylist as a sister, other participants such as Dayna, Rose, and Zora, referred to their stylist as friends. Julia said about the relationship with her stylist, “it’s like friends with benefits,” but the participants clearly explained that it was not in the way the world used the term. The benefits part was the support she received from her stylist. Corine shared that she does not share much with her stylist, but she provides a listening ear for her stylist and gives her advice. She admitted that the stylist reminded her of one of her daughters, partly because they were the same age.

Sub Question 2: How do Black women describe the overall wellbeing experience of the salon experience?

The second sub-question was: How do Black women describe the overall wellbeing experience of the salon experience? The following theme emerged: The client and stylist interaction is not a substitute for professional mental health support. It is a part of the self-care routine for some Black women. Based on the responses from the participants, the salon experience does bring about an outward feeling of wellbeing, especially when they first walk out the door and begin receiving compliments.

Corine shared

It makes you feel good that your hair is done you know that your hair looks good, you know. And you know when you walk out the door, I mean somebody is complementing you before you get to the you know to the car, where when somebody said you know will say miss your hair looks so good.
How one looks when leaving the salon is what the world sees, but more takes place in the salon that only the client and the stylist see. It is not only the hair that is different, but that the client and the stylist are affected in positive ways support and sustaining one another in adversity.

Marcia, the only participant one who is of direct Caribbean descent stated:
I'm also a teacher and the pastor and it's important to me to maintain my sense of well-being as well as to feel good about the way and look where present myself to the world is important to me and I want to show the way I feel on the inside and black woman with natural hair living in the United States. As an immigrant I sometimes think that there is a look that is more acceptable than others are there looks, and I tried to be true to myself and the still look acceptable for an environment which is why my hair, and my makeup is important to me.

Marcia later admitted that her outward appearance was important to her. Although she admitted that maintaining a sense of wellbeing was also important, her main concern was how she appeared to others. Marcia was the participant who felt uncomfortable showcasing her natural hair on Zoom and cried as she recalled her childhood experience of losing her hair due to hair straightening practices. Marcia also expressed how she “loves” her stylist, yet she holds back, opening up completely out of fear of exposing “stuff that is close to her heart.” Marcia shared her experiences with outward appearance during COVID. As she reflected on her experience during the salon shutdowns, she stated:
I had to do virtual classes and it was uncomfortable to show my face if I didn't have my hair on, so it was important for me to still feel comfortable and then I said; OK ,this is me this is where I am, I will not need these wigs, I’m wearing my hair the way it is, and not keep looking forward to how my hair could be ,like what is actual and what is expected
are two different things and I'm waiting for the expected and while I wait for the expected outcome I will cover my hair, and I'm not covering it anymore.

When she was asked what the expected outcome was, she was waiting or, her reply was:

I thought was expected with straight here something that's tame, behaves, it stays in place, I mean it looks sleek that was expected; and what I’m waiting for it find my own natural hair, is it being the kind of length that I can pull it all the way to behave when I'm in public spaces with people in this culture.

Marcia has been going to the same stylist for 15 years and expressed the expectancy to be slightly different when walking out the door, but hairstyle alone does not make the difference. Corine stated that the "salon is a place of I guess so relief, release. because you sit there you just talked to other women," which makes it seem like the communication contributes to the well-being of the clients. Zora, a mental health professional herself, said the salon is "it’s my place to like, let it all out."

**Mental Health Professionals.** The participants' responses answered a question that was asked early on, although it was not a research question: Do black women feel more comfortable talking to their stylist as opposed to a mental health professional? Based on the responses from the participants of this study, speaking with a stylist is not a preferred method of relieving stress for Black women, and it is not a substitute for professional mental health. If anything, it is a supplement to mental health services, both casual and professional. Zora shared how her hair appointment days are a part of a whole self-care day. She stated,

When I go to a salon that’s my self-care day, so and I don't wanna sit there all day when I have a massage scheduled or when I have some quiet time scheduled, or if I have a movie scheduled.
Julia shared how she also makes a day of her self-care, but her day also includes professional mental health services. She stated that hair is part of her self-care routine, and she sees her therapist on the same day.

Through the accounts of the participants, the researcher believes that there are benefits to utilizing the salon as a culturally specific form of coping with stress. Tara, who shares everything with her stylist, described the experience as “liberating.” On the other hand, Marcia admitted that she does not share anything personal with anyone in her life, including her mother and her sister. She does, however, share with her therapist, but when asked about her childhood hair experiences, she fell back in her chair and started crying, an experience that she described as “jolting.” Although she is a Black female, Marcia is not an African American female. She is of Caribbean descent, which is different from the other nine participants born and raised in the United States. Alisha shared that culture makes the difference between speaking with a mental health professional and a stylist.

She stated:

More professional, she gives me more different tools to use, that I can apply in a professional basis, versus talking to my stylist is definitely more personal. She does understand me more on a cultural level. Or some things what my mental health counselor I have to explain, which I don't mind, because it's a cultural difference. But it's more of a cultural thing, why I have to explain it to my mental health counselor, but my stylist, she just gets it because we're of the same culture. We've had a lot of the same experience”.

**Safe Space.** In addition to the cultural experience, the salon's environment provides comfort for opening up to their stylists. The salon setting applied to any area where professional hair services were provided to the participants. Some of the participants received their services in
a fully operated salon, with multiple stylists, and in one case, barbers. This environment meant more than just the stylist and the client present during service. Some participants shared that their stylists provide services out of a salon suite, so it is just them and the stylist when services are rendered. The only time these participants may have the opportunity to meet with someone else may be when they are arriving for service or leaving after service, and other clients are either coming or going. Every participant, except Corine, indicated that the stylist environment was comfortable and conducive to their communication. The difference was that Corine’s salon doubled as a barbershop, and with males being present, the females did not fully engage in conversation. She stated: “Then there's men and women; you have to be careful what you say, sometimes men can take things out of context.”

She also expressed how the males could be vulgar at times, and women did not feel free to share what they wanted. However, based on other participants' responses, when it is just women, even if there is a group of them, they all have the opportunity to engage and share. Pamela shared that although she confides in her stylist, she enjoys the other women as well; she stated, “But it's always a good experience because the other ladies that are in the salon also are all very friendly. We all talk, you know, we know about each other's families.”

When asked about sharing personal information in that environment, she admitted that she never goes in-depth. However, she will solicit some advice, and since there are other women in the salon, they are included in the discussion. She stated,

Where I go, there's three different women in there. And they are all so supportive. And if I've mentioned something to my stylist, and she, like, you know, I don't know, if she'll call the other lady in there. And, you know, we share advice and experiencing
experiences. So, on the outside of that, I would still feel like, you know, still feel comfortable contacting her saying, hey, what do you think about this? And when she doesn’t know, then she'll contact next person to say, hey, what do you think about this? It's like, they're always trying to lift each other up.

Most of the participants shared that they preferred to be in an environment that was just them and the stylist. These participants discussed more intimate details about their life and their family. They spoke about their stressors-- their families laughed and cried with one another. Based on the responses from the participants, the one-on-one experience provided an atmosphere where the clients were able to connect with their stylists on a deeper level. Tara expressed how different people and other elements contribute to the level of comfort in the environment:

If I walk into the salon right now and the energy is off, bad music playing and there's a lot of cursing I wouldn't even subject you know I wouldn't even subject myself to that type of environment.

Other environmental factors included “the décor,” the music,” and the ambiance in addition to the people and their energy. These are all factors. Julia shared about her physical environment at the salon and said:

It has a very nice ambience that is very comfortable and welcoming she has warm colors on her walls, she has candles, she has plants she has snacks which again for children that's like beauty for adults as well snacks water so it's just a real nice comfortable setting unlike a dentist.

However, it still seems like the most important factor is the one-on-one time spent with the stylist and client, Julia added,
It's, you know, a private room, it's just, you know, not, you know, the ins and outs of, you know, different family members, you know, friends and so on. So, you know, because the setup is professional all, you know, that that time, you know, really is dedicated to you.

Sub Question 3: How do Black women describe their experiences when the salons closed during the COVID-19 pandemic?

The third sub-question was: How do Black women describe their experiences when the salons closed during the COVID-19 pandemic? The following theme emerged: Stylists play a role in helping their clients navigate life’s challenges. The COVID-19 related salon shutdowns allowed Black women to have time to reflect on the importance of hair in their lives. One of the requirements for participation was that the clients needed to have attended the salon at least 15 times in the past two years, which averages out to be approximately every six weeks. This included the time prior to the COVID-19 related salon shutdowns. The reason for this requirement was to show that the participants had an established relationship with their stylist prior to the shutdown and were accustomed to keeping their hair maintained regularly. Therefore, the shutdown should have had some type of effect on their routines.

While some of the participants were uncomfortable with not having their hair done, all but one accepted not going to the stylist. They did, however, create and consider different ways to camouflage their hair so it would not appear undone. For example, Marcia said she wore wigs, while Alisha wore scarves. Corine admitted that her daughter suggested that she just cut her hair off, but she refused. Alisha admitted that not having her hair done affected her motivation; therefore, when she begged her stylist to take risks so she could come to do her hair at her house, the stylist complied. This type of risk may have spoken to the closeness of the client and the
stylist, but for the other clients who share close bonds with their stylist, they missed the communication they shared with the stylist at the salon. Nevertheless, they continued to communicate even if it was on a minimal level, such as sharing text messages to check up on each other. The communication was not worth the risk for them meeting in person.

The participants expressed how they continued to support one another during the salon shutdowns. For example, Marcia shared, “During COVID my stylist, she lost her mom not related to COVID, but during that time, and so we were there with her, and she got to move her salon ’cause Covid was just an awful nightmare because so she rented a chair in the salon that salon closed and so I said come over, or what do you want us to do now?” In that example, the participant assisted her stylist with a move. In another example, Julia stated, “I just continued to send her since my income had not changed and going to see her regularly was already budgeted; I continued to send her a check for my usual amount.” These acts of service and support showed that the shutdowns did not impact the bonds between stylists and their clients.

After a considerable time of reflection, some of the participants were more concerned with the risks, as opposed to hair. Tara stated, “I'm a little bit more flexible and more understanding now, now versus before and it may be because of you know the pandemic has happened and it has taught me to be patient and just basically wait.” It was interesting that many of the participants shared this same sentiment, where they learned not to place so much focus on hair. This was the first time in history that Black women were stripped of having complete control over their hair. Although it is understood that the salon shutdowns only limited access to the salons, and black women still could do their hair, the reality for many women is that they do not do their own hair; some may not know how. But for whatever the reason is, these women adjusted and, in some cases, began to reevaluate hair. For example, Marcia realized that she was
tired of hiding behind what she thought was an acceptable appearance, and she stopped wearing wigs and started to lock her hair shortly after the restrictions were lifted. In the black community, women tend to express certain hair freedom from locking their hair. The freedom comes from not worrying what others will think about the choice to wear their natural hair. So, in essence, for some women like Marcia, she experienced a sense of hair freedom from the lockdown.

**Discussion**

This section will describe how the current study supports and adds to the existing research regarding developing the relationship between Black female clients and their stylists. The section starts by exploring how the theoretical framework constructs helped identify the themes revealed through this study. Next, this section reflects how Black women's history and hair have evolved into the interaction between clients and their stylists, becoming a culturally specific form of coping with stress for Black Women in the United States. Finally, there will be a discussion of the limitations and delimitations, the implications, and the recommendations for future research.

**Theoretical Confirmation**

The literature review for this research began with a theoretical framework used as a lens while conducting the research. The theoretical framework included the Relational Cultural Theory (RCT), which suggests a need for belonging for all women. The constructs of the RCT suggest women yearn to develop relationships by building connections based on working with relational images, mutual empathy, supported vulnerability, and authenticity (Frey, 2013). When this form of connection is established, it allows a person to be open and expressive and fosters an environment of growth (Jordan et al., 2008).
Through the accounts of many participants, the sharing of information between the client and stylist was mutual; as a result, the more details the participants and their stylists were willing to share, the closer the relationship developed. Tara expressed the depth of the communication and relationship with her stylist when she spoke of how they have cried together and shared stories about the struggles of marriage and parenting. Tara has expressed that she considered her stylist her sister; she trusts her more than her mental health professional because she understands her. They share the same spiritual beliefs, and Tara says that after God, her stylist is the first person she will confide. The mutual bond shared between the two is on such a level that they are now each other’s stylist. Dayna, who is admittedly guarded, which appeared evident to the researcher during the interviews, is also the stylist for her stylist. She indicated that while she does not disclose a lot with everyone, she trusts her stylist to open to her.

The second theory used was the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPH). The constructs of TPB are built on beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and behaviors and suggest that a person is most likely to engage in an activity if they believe they can control the outcome (Ajzen, 1991). When comparing the original review of the literature, along with the findings of this research looking through the lens of this behavior, it was possible to determine that Black women, as represented by this research, tend to exercise control when seeking a stylist or salon environment where they are comfortable expressing themselves. These women even control what they choose to express or engage in conversation at the salon. Black women choose the people and spaces where they are comfortable expressing themselves.

This study confirms that although these participants trust their stylists and are willing to engage in personal conversations, there is still a level of control exercised in the communication. For example, although willing to provide advice to her stylist, Corine did not engage in any
deeper communication beyond providing an update on her children or grandchildren. Corine also expressed that her salon doubled as a barbershop, and men tend to take things out of context, so she chose not to engage in deep conversations for this reason. The participants who were serviced in more personal settings appeared to feel more comfortable releasing personal communication. If trust is established between the client and stylist, the client is comfortable confiding in the stylist, knowing that the information would not be shared with others. It was also evident through this research that the participants were able to maintain a sense of control in the communication with the stylist.

The results of this study confirmed that Black women, who are often tasked with carrying the load of their family and their communities, need a safe place where they can share their vulnerabilities and get advice on how to conquer challenges in life. The history of these safe spaces is deeply rooted in the culture of African Americans, where Black women have a long history of depending on other women to assist them with escaping oppression (Sharma, 2018). In yesteryears, this support was through a physical escape; today, it is mental. Yesterday, Black women communicated through song; today, they communicate through conversation. Yesterday it happened while on the plantation; today it happens in the salon.

The History of Black Women and Their Hairstyling Practices

Mbilshaka et al. (2019) reported that intergenerational connections are made through physical touch and conversations in childhood. This study confirms this as each participant referenced their first stylist as their mother, caretaker, or another woman in the community. If a member of the community did their hair, she was also a member who was connected in another form. For example, one participant shared that the first stylist she had outside of her mom was a neighbor who made sure she made it home safely from school. This participant, a single mother,
spoke of how her current stylist had continued the tradition by ensuring her client’s children and mother had arrived safely home or at other destinations when the client was unavailable.

Haircare entails physical touch and conversation. Whether the young girls were allowed to engage in the conversation at a young age or not, being a witness to the conversation exhibited that the salon, whether in the kitchen, a suite, or a salon is where the connections are made. For example, Zora spoke of her memories of going to the salon with her mother as a child and witnessing the women's conversations in the salon. She hated being in the salon for the many hours it took for her mother to receive service, but she just sat and listened and watched the bonds develop. Zora and Rose, a mother and daughter, shared this experience with their mothers and took part in this study.

In addition to the connections made through physical touch and conversations, this research revealed that the relationships developed between the stylist and their clients could be related to Paternal Bonding, part of attachment theory, coined by Bowlby (1969). This theory suggests that the attachments formed with primary caregivers in early childhood remain relevant throughout their lives. The participants' accounts in this study suggest that the bonds established with their first stylist, their caregivers, are continued with their stylist. For example, Marcia, who did not name her mother as her first stylist, admits that she does not share matters close to her heart with her stylist, but she does not feel safe sharing them with her mother.

Identity

In addition to maternal bonds, the importance of identity is directly related to childhood experiences. While the salon space is examined and discussed as an outlet throughout this research, the external image and identity remain. Palmer et al. (2014) suggests that their family members influence black women's image of themselves. Zora, whose mother Corine was also a
participant in this study, stated that “my mom went every week, so it was kind of instilled in me that that is a necessary portion of taking care of yourself.” Corine shared that her mother instilled the importance of looking good for her. She stated, “my mom was a great stylist, and she would flat iron our hair, shampoo would present whatever. And we looked great. So, my childhood was good because we never went out the house with our hair looking bad.”

Abrams et al. (2019) states that the need to appear well put together can be stressful for Black women. This can often result in symptoms of depression and self-silencing. This was confirmed by the account of Alisha, who admitted that when her hair is not done, it is mood-altering. She stated, “I can tell you I feel different when it's not together. Um, I feel like I don't want to do anything. I don't want to leave the house. I just feel like bland, like, like, I don't. Yeah, I don't have really any motivation.”

The pressure of looking good has had a physical, mental, and emotional impact on black women. Alopecia, which means hair loss, has been experienced by black women for many reasons. Although stress-related alopecia was not mentioned in the current study, Alopecia was experienced by one of the participants, Marcia, who admitted that hair straightening practices caused her to lose hair when she was younger. While reflecting on a memory of having her hair permed, Marcia stated, “Well I had lost patches on it, it was a nightmare. It was a straight-up nightmare. I lost patches on my hair, and they never grew back for years. I think I might have been 20-22 when my hair kind of regrew back”. Marcia did admit that she has since abandoned all attempts to straighten her hair as of December 2020.

Gathers and Mahan (2014) suggest that there is a lack of understanding of the unique cultural practices for black women in the field of dermatology. Therefore, assistance of these issues should be addressed within the African American community (Linnan et al., 2014). The
participants of this study confirmed that it is important to them to have their hair styled by other black women because they are best suited to understand what their hair needs and make accurate decisions that support the health of their hair.

Zora spoke to the importance of trusting someone with the health of her hair when she talked about having to find another stylist due to relocation. She stated,

I live between three states and so just recently made that transition between Mississippi and Alabama, and I haven't found a stylist in Mississippi or Alabama, so I'll wait until I go back home to Houston and see my stylist there. I have a potential stylists in Mississippi, and I asked my potential stylist to talk to my stylist in Houston to make sure… what’s she saying I trust my stylist to say OK yes let's move forward with her because I work very hard to keep my hair healthy and its natural and so I need someone who is familiar with curing for natural hair and that's not my area of expertise but I do trust my stylist enough to say “hey can you talk to the lady and see if this is in line with what you are currently doing or what you were currently suggests.”

Although concerned with their image, Black women embrace the health of their natural hair and are less concerned with sacrificing the health of their hair for the sake of the image or appearance of others outside of their culture.

Black Superwoman Phenomenon

Black women must present an image of strength, suppress their emotions, and resist being in a position of vulnerability or dependence. Black women should also be determined to succeed and have an obligation to help others. This obligation is a multidimensional phenomenon known as the Black Superwoman. Due to the nature of the study, which focused on
the participants having an outlet, there was no expression of the need to appear strong (Woods-Giscombé, 2014),

If the Black female feels that she is in a safe space in the salon, she does not have to live up to the expectations of being a superwoman, at least not for the few hours that she is receiving service. The participants' accounts revealed that black women would lean on others to ask for help. Julia, a full-time caregiver of her mother, shared how it is difficult for her at times. In her willingness to be vulnerable and express herself, her stylist offers her a helping hand by picking her mother up for her from the day center. Marcia’s stylist shared her need to move out of the salon where she rented a booth. Her willingness to express her need at that moment allowed Marcia to offer help during her time of need.

The space in the salon appears to be different from the spaces black women operate in on the other side of the doors. If there is a separation, a clear and distinct place of safety, the Black woman does not need to be concerned with how she presents herself. Marcia admitted that she brings her role as a Pastor in her community into the salon space, and for that reason, she will not allow herself to appear vulnerable at all in front of her stylist. She does not allow that in front of anyone. She has an obligation not to because of her position. This research confirmed the Black Superwoman Phenomenon but added that when in an environment where Black women feel safe among their peers, they are willing to take off their cape and show their human side.

**Culturally Specific Coping Strategies**

When Black women internalize the role of the Strong Black Woman stereotypes, it can influence their wellbeing (West et al., 2016). Using Marcia as an example, since she was the one who expressed her need to hold things in for appearance’s sake, she is the only participant who expressed a fortuitous response when she fell back and cried when asked about her childhood. “It
jolted me a little” was her response; a jolt is not little; it comes on abruptly and roughly. Even if she lost the control that she works so hard to maintain for a moment. Her crying was her body speaking the words her mouth refused to release. It is saying yes, we have been exposed to some form of trauma, something is going on with us on the inside, and we have been holding it in” (Tsur et al., 2018).

Marcia, as mentioned earlier, is the only participant from a different culture; she is an immigrant of Caribbean descent. Although she is a black female, her cultural experience is different from the rest of the participants, also Black females, but she was born and raised in the United States. Lewis-Coles and Constantine (2006) states that culturally specific coping strategies refer to the influence of one’s cultural heritage and knowledge which gives meaning to a stressful event and provides the resources for dealing with the stressful event. Therefore, utilizing the salon may not be culturally a form of an outlet for Marcia; however, for the other women in the study, it is deeply rooted in their culture and has been proven to be a beneficial outlet for decompressing, which contributes to their wellbeing.

**Cognitive Emotional Debriefing**

The initial literature review suggested that cognitive, emotional debriefing is an adaptive reaction African Americans use to manage stress by using distractions, venting, and processing stressful incidents with others to manage environmental stress (Greer, 2011). For example, some participants shared that they process stressful incidents by venting them to their stylist while receiving service. However, this form of coping may not feel like an intentional strategy since it is done under the disguise and distraction of getting their hair maintained. Through the accounts of the participants of this study, it is confirmed that Black women utilize Cognitive Emotional Debriefing to relieve stress.
**Religious Coping**

The salon experience has proven to be a culturally specific form of coping with stress. It incorporates religious coping, which has been one of the most utilized forms of coping in the Black culture. Religious coping, which includes looking to God for strength, support, and guidance, is a resource for establishing resilience and healthy mechanisms to alleviate stress (Vanderweele et al., 2017). The current study has shown through the participants' accounts that prayer and speaking with the stylist about Biblical beliefs have been foundational in establishing their chosen salon as a place of refuge.

In addition to praying with and for one another, some participants expressed an appreciation towards their stylists as someone they can trust for direction and advice. Zora stated, “I need to be reminded of what Bible says, cause I go away from it, and so she kind of brings it into perspective.” Tara stated that one of the reasons she trusts her stylist with providing advice in guidance in her marriage is because “my stylist understands, and um agrees with how I feel or the in the biblical standpoint.” Through the accounts of the participants of this study, it is confirmed that Black women utilize religious coping with relieving stress.

**Professional Mental Health Treatment**

This study revealed that Professional Mental Health Treatment is an acceptable and culturally accepted form of coping with stress among Black women. However, institutional betrayal has contributed to mental health disparities and a barrier for African Americans in the United States (Gomez, 2015). Institutional Betrayal refers to the difficulties one has in continuing to function in an environment where they have felt betrayed or violated their safety (Smith & Freyd, 2013). In response, the person will withdraw from the relationship.
While conducting the interviews for this study, there was no mention of distrust among the participants towards mental health professionals or settings; however, the research has confirmed that withdrawal is a response to institutional betrayal. While this was not verbalized as a direct form of institutional betrayal during the interviews, some participants confirmed that they had withdrawn from the salon setting. In addition, some participants who preferred to attend a stylist in a private suite as opposed to a salon with multiple stations have this preference due to a bad experience in a non-private setting.

Tara expressed this when she spoke on the experience of receiving service in a private environment as to one that is open. She stated, “It is different now from then; maybe it was more so a lot of gossip a lot of bad energy as opposed to where I am right now”. Although, she appreciates where she is now, she stated “I can't do fake I can't do people who talk about folks here do messiness you know I can't do any of that, so I appreciate her being really appreciate her not being messy I appreciate her about talking about this one or that one she don't talk to me about clients.” The previous experience of people being” messy” and gossiping was a violation of her trust. While viewing this through the lens of the Theory of Planned Behavior, Tara believes that she can exercise some form of control over her environment by going to a private suite, which is why she engages in the activity. However, based on her response to a salon that is not private, she stated , “if I walk into the salon right now and the energy is off, bad music playing and there's a lot of cursing I wouldn't even subject you know I wouldn't even subject myself to that that type of environment.” This thought supports the theory by indicating that she will not engage in an activity if there is a perception of being in a situation where there is a lack of control on her part (Godin & Kok, 1996).

*The Response to the COVID-19 Salon Shutdowns*
At the time of the proposal for this research, it was presumed that by the time this research was completed, we would slowly be returning to the regular routines of life pre-COVID. However, with the numbers unstable, as we learn to adjust to a new norm of mask-wearing, make decisions to vaccinate or not vaccinate, and have to choose whether to choose freedom or maintain employment, hair seems to be one of the least concerns for black women. The only impact of the shutdowns appeared to be the salon's operations or the space they operated. Marcia stated that her stylist “created a shed at the back of her house [and] brought her license and everything . . . it is really nice . . . just saying it's even nicer environment that she had before because now everything in that shed is just hers.”

I expected more black women to be distraught over the salon shutdowns based on my own lived experience of the COVID-19 salon shutdowns. Not just for hair, but rather how it would affect them emotionally, especially since they were no longer communicating with their stylist. Dayna revealed, “most of my consultants communication is, you know, during our visits, so, you know, it's still different, though, we may not pick up the phone and call all the time. But, yes, I can depend on, you know, those monthly appointments at the time that we can communicate.”. Although Dayna expressed that communication was different, neither she nor the other participants expressed that not being able to communicate with their stylist during the COVID-19 shutdowns impacted their wellbeing. It was hair-related and seemed to be directly impacted by how the participant felt about herself if there was an impact. Marcia revealed that she had issues with how her hair looked and tried to cover it with wigs because, as both a teacher and a Pastor, she thought she had a certain image to portray. Alisha tried to cover her hair with scarves, but broke down and had her hair done, despite the social distancing restrictions that were in place.
Rose confirmed that she missed having her hair done and the communication, but the communication continued due to the nature of the relationship with her stylist. What she missed the most was her hair being done. Rose stated,

I missed that and missed the conversations I would have had with her in the shop. But we still talked on the phone, you know, so I wasn't lost but you miss from looking good. You know, you got your stylist and if they know what they're doing, they're gonna have you looking really nice when you leave out of there. So, you miss that. Okay. And you miss getting the compliments because when you walk out of that shop, who man who did your hair, your hair is so pretty. I like that style. You missed the compliments, you know.

The other participants shared that they were willing to let their hair go or make some other form of change not to have to worry about hair. Zora stated, “we would check on one another, but I did my own hair”. Tara confirmed that missing hair appointments was not the priority. She stated "it didn't bother me because there were so much other things that were um yeah important then getting my hair done, so my focus was on other stuff making sure that my family was safe you know making sure that we had all the information we needed about the pandemic, so it wasn't really a factor to me didn't bother me. " Tara also stated "so for me to cut it wouldn’t be anything it would have been nothing to me.”

Julia was the only participant who experienced hardship as a result of the shutdown due to her role as a caretaker and her stylist being a major support system for her, Julia stated, “ I've not had a break from caregiving since like a full day of caregiving since February of 2020 so there were lots of hits for me I know for some people it was a time when they got a chance to
you know sit and have a moment and reflect on all of those great things and bake bread for me it meant my already full plate in life was now I was doing it with no safety net no support”.

Tara was the only participant who expressed a need for having the information she needed during the pandemic; aside from that, there was no other mention about information sharing. Some authors suggested that the salons may have been beneficial to disseminating responses about the COVID 19 response in the same way that they were to previous health issues in the black community. In the past, these have included colon screening (Floyd et al., 2017), HIV (Bassett et al., 2019), and social problems like intimate partner violence (Beebe et al., 2017). However, based on the results of the findings for this study, it is not determined how or if the salons would have been of assistance towards the response and mitigation efforts.

**Implications**

**Theoretical Implications**

The Theoretical framework for this study relied on the RCT that suggests that humans yearn for connections and relationships that speak to their needs and are mutually beneficial. The TPB also suggests that self-stigma and perceived barriers create a basis for the help seeking behaviors, resulting in people being more willing to engage in activities to control the outcome. Reviewing the existing research through this theoretical lens and conducting new research through this study, it has been determined that religious coping plays a part in black women's choices when allowing themselves to make connections and engage in activities. Safety and trust, although not listed as an emerging theme, seemed to provide the basis for engagement among the women in this study.

**Empirical Implications**
The current study’s findings include four themes that inform mental health, pastoral care, dermatology, and cosmetology. The implications of these findings can impact the way service providers in those fields view the needs of this group of women from a cultural perspective, the way they train their employees and provide services in the future. The section will address these implications further, which addresses practical implications.

**Practical Implications**

The implications of this study will impact service providers who serve Black women for various needs but may not understand how due to their cultural experiences, considerations should be made to how black women approach their hair. These special service areas include mental health, pastoral care, dermatology, cosmetology, and any organizations that employ Black Women. The following are the implications for each type of stakeholder.

**Mental Health Providers**

The most important implication based on this study is the need for additional research regarding the impact of hair on the mental health of black women. It was determined through this study that Black women are in support of seeking mental health treatment from a professional, and speaking with a stylist is not a substitute; however, due to cultural issues, it is utilized as a supplement. Additionally, it was evident that trauma is associated with Black women and their hair. Current mental health professionals may not be aware of the questions to ask; therefore, further research and study by Mental Health Providers on cultural issues can assist black women with getting to the roots of many of the issues and the impact of these issues for Black female clients. Knowledge of trauma responses and multicultural competencies for working with Back
women can be increased by the information extracted from the lived experiences of study participants.

**Pastoral Care Providers and Religious Leaders**

In addition to Mental Health Providers, Pastoral Care providers, and other providers and leaders in the various religious communities can benefit from gaining knowledge of the pressures Black women face with appearance. It was evident from this research that Black women value prayer and understanding the Word. However, instead of seeking assistance and drawing strength and counsel from the church, they find support from religious coping with members outside of the church. Pastoral Care Providers and Religious Leaders can benefit from having qualified counselors on staff who are sensitive to the whole person's needs, body, soul, and spirit. Further increased knowledge of the deeply rooted historical context, intersectionality of identity development, stereotypical ideals of beauty, and subsequent familial and societally imposed pressures will inform providers.

**Dermatology**

In this study's pre-research and research phases, it was determined that although dermatologists are the professionals trained to respond to hair care issues that result in Alopecia. Due to a lack of understanding of the practices of black hair care, many women are referred to seeking assistance from their stylists. It would be recommended that in the field of dermatology, there would be more of a focus on research on the culture of black hair care and hair styling practices. There should be cultural training in dermatology so that providers can become trusted medical professionals so that Black women do not have to rely on their stylist to help with issues
beyond their training. Current studies may exist about the condition, but this field benefits from learning how to communicate concerns and aid this population.

**Cosmetology**

One of the most important implications to emerge from this study is the need to do more study on cosmetology. There is an existing concern that the field of cosmetology overall does not cater to hair care needs for Black Women. The training provides the basics, leaving novice stylists to create products and styles that appeal to the needs and likes of black women. Without proper training and knowledge base on how these styles and products may affect the hair in the long term, black women are experiencing alopecia at high rates. With additional research, this field can benefit from additional knowledge and training focused on their black clientele by implementing trichology services to their training and services. This field can also benefit from additional research on the benefits this field has on the well-being of its clients. It is important to connect with women, but when faced with a woman in emotional distress and relies on her stylist for assistance, it could be detrimental simply because she gets it culturally. Cosmetologists could benefit from additional research and training in basic mental health regarding recognizing the signs, knowing how to respond, and knowing how to refer.

**Delimitations and Limitations**

There were several purposeful decisions made to define the boundaries of this study. In this section, the delimitations and limitations will be discussed to understand the accuracy and reliability of the results fully. In addition, the delimitations can be utilized to assist in future research.

**Delimitations**
The researcher used purposeful decisions to define the boundaries of this study. The participants of this study had to identify as Black women living in the United States, of African or Caribbean descent. This criterion was established because a person can be Caucasian and born in Africa but raised in the United States. That individual could argue that she is African American, in which she may be correct, but she would not have lived the black cultural experience. Parameters for this study only included women who lived the Black cultural experience, who could share the lived experience of this phenomenon. The other boundaries were the participants had to be between the ages of 25-75 years old. The ages of 25 were thought to be when women made their own decisions about their hair and attended the salon. If the recruitment had started younger, there could have been college students or young adults who have not completely navigated life on their own; therefore, their salon experience may or may not have been their own, or the decisions in choosing a stylist have been due to financial hardships. The next boundary was attending the same salon at least 15 times in two years. Initially, the criteria were one year, which would have been approximately every six weeks; however, due to COVID 19, there should have been a break in service. This time frame would also include women who wore all hairstyles and provide enough time for required maintenance in between services; the requirement to attend the same stylist for a minimum of one year is to show an established working relationship with the stylist. The decision to choose the current criteria was mainly to ensure that all participants had an established relationship with their current stylist and received regular hair maintenance service.

**Limitations**

One of the weaknesses of the present study is that all but one of the participants had natural hair. Therefore, no conclusions can be accurately drawn regarding whether the results of
this study would apply to women who have not returned to natural. This is a limitation because women who wear their hair in a natural state, making little to no changes to the texture or length of their natural hair, are more likely to require less assistance from a stylist when managing their hair regularly. Women who wear styles that alter the natural texture, color, or style of their hair; and women who cannot manage their own hair daily would have been likely to have provided a different response to the COVID-19 salon shutdowns. The only participant who did not have natural hair was also the only participant who was either directly or indirectly recruited through social media. Aside from this participant, whom the researcher purposely sought out because of the knowledge of her commitment to a salon, all other participants were recruited from hair groups on social media. There was an attempt to recruit through the recommendations of known stylists, but that would have limited the participants to Maryland only. The study was not controlled for education level, marital status, socio-economic status, and religious preference.

After reflecting on the interviews, another limitation observed was the missed opportunity to explore whether the salon could be an outlet for mental and physical health information. Considering the established trust between clients and stylists, it would be essential to understand if they would be open to receiving information if health care providers were introduced or provided general information in the salons to begin conversations regarding health concerns affecting the community.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

After reviewing the findings of the current study, the design limitations, and the delimitations, several recommendations for future studies have emerged. These recommendations would fill in additional gaps in the previous literature regarding black women,
identity development, and their need to mask their emotions, secondary to cultural norms and perceptions of strength associated with their upbringing. The first recommendation for future research is how the early experiences of hair styling at the hands of mothers and maternal figures affect the relationships that black women have with other black women in adulthood. In addition, I would recommend future research that compares if the bonds between black women who receive services for natural hair (and locs) is different from women whose hair is not worn in natural styles. It is also recommended that there be future research to explore the bonds between clients and stylists who are in private salon suites, as opposed to full-service salons with multiple stylists and booths. I would recommend a similar study to the current study to determine if the bonding for women who commit to black male stylists has the same emotional benefits as black females who commit to female stylists. Lastly, I would duplicate this same study with women of other cultures to determine if the bond between clients and stylists is cultural. A duplication for this current study with participants with more specific questions geared to early childhood experiences and experiences during COVID-19 would be beneficial, with specific questions asking whether black women would want to discuss COVID-related questions in the salon space.

**Summary**

This study exploring the lived experiences of black women and the relationship with their stylist brought forth interesting insight into the dynamic among black women in this environment. For these Strong Black Superwomen, the salon space is their version of Clark Kent’s phonebooth. They go in as themselves and come out ready for whom the world needs them to be, and it is the only place that can safely conceal both sides of their identity. Through the lens of the Relational Cultural Theory and the Theory of Controlled Behavior, this research was designed to answer one central research question, and three sub-questions, by women who
lived this phenomenon. In this final section, we will provide the answers to these questions: How do Black women describe the cultural aspects of the salon experience; How do Black women describe their experiences with social supports; How do Black women describe the overall wellbeing experience of the salon experience; How do Black women describe their experiences when the salons closed during the COVID-19 pandemic?

The cultural aspects of the salon experience are that it is not just a place to go and get your hair done. It is a spiritual refuge for Black women in the United States. The salon allows women the opportunity to escape from the world, escape judgment, exchange advice, and encourage one another. This exchange can occur because of shared experiences, shared beliefs, and shared cultures. Not every salon in America will provide this type of outlet for every black woman. Therefore, black women intentionally seek an environment with a stylist that they feel safe with and can trust. Once this criterion is met, black women tend to stay with them, resulting in friendships that mutually support each other for many years.

This research determined that trust was the foundation for the relationships between black women and their stylists. It was originally assumed that a lack of trust due to institutional betrayal was the bond between stylists and the clients. As a result, speaking with a stylist was preferred over speaking with a mental health professional. This research did not confirm this; instead, this research revealed that black women seek services from mental health professionals as needed; speaking with a stylist is not a substitute for black women. It is a supplement to their self-care routine. Black women trust the professionalism and education of the mental health professional, but their cultural needs may not be met. Contrastingly, while black women can relate to their stylists on cultural levels, there are limits to the depths of the discussions and advice sharing because the participants did not believe the stylist could fully operate in the
capacity of a counselor. The stylists fulfilled a cultural need for these women. They created relationships that mirrored the bonds they shared with the women of their childhood, who nurtured and supported them, except this time, they could exercise some form of control.

The main benefit discovered in this research was one of mutual support, which in accordance with the RCT, suggests that women tend to gravitate towards relationships that have meaning and empower; these participants and stylists are that for one another. They check on one another, relate to one another, encourage one another, and support one another, both in the salon and out of the salon. They can expose and explore parts of one another that is closed off to everyone else in the world and trust that their secrets are safe. The women in this study had no problem admitting that they struggled as parents, struggled as spouses, struggled as caretakers, just struggled as women in general. The expression of their struggles to their stylist did not result in shame or embarrassment but encouragement and support for one another.

Another finding in this study is shared spiritual beliefs and practices such as prayer were shared among the participants and their stylists. This common form of cultural coping was often utilized to help one another navigate life from a spiritual perspective. This spiritual support was reflected during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, it was determined that not even a pandemic could have interfered with the bond black women have with their stylists. Black women were not as affected by the salon shutdowns of the COVID-19 mitigation efforts as originally thought. While outside of the physical, financial, and overall impact on their wellbeing, hair was the least bit of a concern for most of the women who participated in this study. Like all the challenges black women are faced with navigating, black women adjusted to this global health crisis. For many of the participants, the shutdown allowed the women time to
reflect on life, its stressors, and how to embrace their natural selves and reevaluate the value they place on their hair while still maintaining the relationship with their stylist.

The implication of this study includes a broad spectrum of stakeholders. Professional Mental Health Service providers, Pastoral Counselors, Dermatologists, and Cosmetologists can use the information that emerged from this study to understand the cultural needs of Black women who seek their assistance. In addition, the hope is that the information and results found in this study will assist members of higher education to recognize the need for incorporating more culturally specific forms of training for future service providers in the fields of mental health, religious services, dermatology, and cosmetology; on the needs of providing a more culturally specific form of addressing the needs that contribute to the overall wellbeing of Black women in the United States.
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Appendix A

IRB Approval

July 1, 2021

Nicole Holden
Frederick Volk

Re: IRB Approval - IRB-FY20-21-920 A Phenomenological Study Exploring the Client and Stylist Interaction as a Culturally Specific Form of Coping with Stress for Black Women in the United States

Dear Nicole Holden, Frederick Volk:

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB). This approval is extended to you for one year from the following date: July 1, 2021. If you need to make changes to the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit a modification to the IRB. Modifications can be completed through your Cayuse IRB account.

Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46.110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office
Appendix B

Consent Form

CONSENT FORM
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY EXPLORING THE CLIENT AND STYLIST INTERACTION AS A CULTURALLY SPECIFIC FORM OF COPING WITH STRESS FOR BLACK WOMEN IN THE UNITED STATES
Nicole M. Holden
Liberty University
Department of Community Care and Counseling/School of Behavioral Sciences

You are invited to be in a research study exploring the stylist and client interactions and the mental and emotional effects on Black women's well-being in the United States. You were selected as a possible participant because you are 25–75 years old, identify yourself as a Black female of African or Caribbean descent, live in the United States, have visited the same Black female stylist or attended a salon owned and operated by a black female stylist(s) for a minimum one year, and have had your hair styled professionally at least 15 times during the last 24 months. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Background Information: Nicole M. Holden, a doctoral candidate in the Department of Community Care and Counseling in the School of Behavioral Sciences at Liberty University, is conducting this study. The purpose of this study is to bring awareness of the use of going to the salon as a way of coping with stress and emotional and mental imbalances by Black women by examining the relationship the clients have with their stylist and the value placed on being able to share personal experiences.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:
1. Participate in an hour-long recorded interview via Zoom.
2. Participate in a 30-minute follow-up interview to review and correct transcripts (if requested).

Risks: The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

Benefits: This study does not provide direct benefits to the participant. However, data gleaned from this study might benefit researchers by bringing awareness to how Black women use the salon experience as a way of coping with stress and managing their emotional and mental well-being.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

• Participants' responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
• Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

Compensation: Participants will not receive compensation for taking part in this study.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to choose not to answer any of the questions or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study: If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher using the email address in the next paragraph. Should you decide to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and not included in this study.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Nicole M. Holden. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at nmholden@liberty.edu or 410-240-5911. You may also contact the researcher’s faculty sponsor, Dr. Frederick Volk, at fvolk@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.

Statement of Consent: By signing this document, you agree to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information above.

Printed Participant Name  Signature of Participant  Date

Signature of Investigator  Date
Appendix C

Interview Guide


Time of interview:

Date:

Location:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Role in the salon (stylist/client):

This interview will be conducted to receive first-hand accounts of what the benefits are for Black women who interact with a regular stylist. This interview will be conducted with women who have lived this phenomenon. This study aims to determine if Black women are more comfortable utilizing the salon as an outlet than speaking with a professional counselor for coping with stress.

Interview Questions:

1. Please introduce yourself to me as if we just met one another.

2. How would you describe your experiences with going to the stylist?

3. How would you describe your feelings when you are unable to make an appointment with your hairstylist?

4. How would you describe your level of commitment to your stylist?

5. How would you describe your experience in the salon aside from getting your hair done?
6. How would you describe the experience of going to the salon as a child?

7. How would you describe your relationship with your stylist?

8. How would you describe how environment of the salon factor into your level of comfort with the salon experience?

9. How would you describe the experience of speaking to stylist about personal matters?

10. Please describe how maintaining your own hair differed from your hairstyling experiences prior to the COVID-19 pandemic?

Thank you for your participation in this interview; your participation and responses will remain confidential.

Follow-up Interview Questions

1. Did you receive a copy of the transcripts you requested?

2. Were there anything that appeared to be inaccurate on incorrect?

3. Is there anything you would like to change, or correct?
Appendix D

Recruitment Letter

Dear Potential Participant,

My name is Nicole M. Holden, and I am a doctoral student at Liberty University in the School of Behavioral Sciences Community Care and Counseling program. I am conducting research as part of the requirements to obtain a doctorate. The purpose of my research is to study the benefits of the salon experience on the mental and emotional well-being of black women in the United States.

If you are a black woman between the ages of 25-75 years old and are willing to participate, you will be asked to complete and return a 5-minute screening survey to determine your eligibility for the study, participate in an interview for approximately 1 hour, and a potential 30-minute follow-up discussion. The information you provide will become part of my doctoral dissertation, but you will have access to the transcripts of our interview and will be invited to correct or change the information provided about your personal experience during the 30-minute follow-up discussion if one is requested. Your name and other identifying information will be requested as part of your screening and interview process, but all personal information will remain confidential and kept on a password protected external hard drive.

A screening questionnaire and study consent form will be sent out via email. To participate, please complete the screening survey, sign the consent document, and return them to me by email. Upon review of the screening survey, if you meet the study criteria and are eligible to participate in the study, I will then contact you to schedule an interview. If you have any questions, please contact me at.

Sincerely,

Nicole M. Holden
ATTENTION FACEBOOK FRIENDS: I am a doctoral student at Liberty University, where I am conducting research as part of the requirements for my dissertation. The purpose of my research is to better understand the benefits of the interaction between black women and their stylists. Participants, if willing, will be asked to answer a brief eligibility survey, which should take less than 5 minutes. If found eligible, I would schedule an interview via Zoom. If you would like to participate and see if you meet the criteria please send your email address or leave it in my DM and I will send you additional information about the study, the survey, and consent form if eligible.

Thank you so much- Nicole!