

**ASHESI UNIVERSITY COLLEGE**

**GHANAIAN WOMEN AND THE USE OF HUMAN HAIR EXTENSIONS**

BY

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**APRIL 2014**

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## **Declaration**

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own original work and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in this university or elsewhere.

Candidate's Signature: .....

Candidate's Name: .....

Date: .....

*I hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of the thesis were supervised in accordance with the guidelines on supervision of thesis laid down by Ashesi University College.*

Supervisor's Signature: .....

Supervisor's Name: .....

Date: .....

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## **ABSTRACT**

The human hair industry in Ghana has been on the rise for the past two years and has become extremely profitable. This is because Ghanaian women have gained more knowledge on the use of such extensions. Despite the high costs associated with these extensions, women are still buying them for special occasions and for everyday use. These hair extensions are readily available and all over the market so women have more access to buying them.

Data collected shows that about 70-80% of hair salon's female clients in Accra want to have human hair extensions fixed into their hair. This study therefore investigates the reasons why Ghanaian women are wearing human hair extensions, as opposed to other popular hairstyles in Ghana. It also addresses the issue of how these extensions affect a woman's perception of beauty.

The paper also delves into the history of the various hairstyles African American women have been doing. The history can also be applied to Ghanaian women as they have the same hair texture. Finally, the study provides useful recommendations for Ghanaian women who regularly wear human hair extensions.

**Keywords:** human hair extensions, beauty, Ghanaian women

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## **CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION**

### **1.0 – Background**

Beautiful is not a word that women willingly associate themselves with. For example, Etcoff, Orbach, Scott, & D’Agostino, (2004:9) note that from a given list of only positive or neutral adjectives such as “natural,” “average,” “beautiful,” “sexy,” and “gorgeous,” to describe their looks, majority of women worldwide are most comfortable using the words natural (31%) or average (29%) to describe their looks. According to these same scholars, only 2% of women around the world choose “beautiful” to describe their looks. Even fewer choose “attractive” (9%), “feminine” (8%), “good-looking” (7%) or “cute” (7%).

What then does the word beauty mean? In my opinion, beauty is the outward features such as one’s hair, eyes or body shape that is pleasing to the sense of sight. Most women around the world feel that the ideal beautiful woman is “white, super thin, and blonde with straight hair. This ideal, which is a reflection of White cultural values and a European colonial past, is imposed on women of various cultural and racial backgrounds, and is often consciously or unconsciously recognized as the legitimate standard” (Swain, 2012: 1). African – American women however tend to focus on having long, silky, straight hair (which is termed as ‘good’ hair) to express their beauty. This European ideal of beauty is no different for women in Ghana. Ghanaian women are becoming more obsessed having long, silky straight hair to radiate their beauty.

There are many other hairstyles that African-American women, and Ghanaian women as well, have been exposed to such as “dreadlocked,

"natural," curled, faded, braided, twisted, straightened, permed, crimped, cornrowed, and even bald" (Lester, 2000: 204)". Out of these various hairstyles, Ghanaian women, and African American women alike, are choosing to wear weaves in order to appear attractive and beautiful.

There are two different types of hair extensions that Ghanaian women use. The first type is synthetic hair, which is defined as "strands of plastic fibres that are manufactured to look and to feel like natural hair" (Thibodeaux, 2013: para. 8, line 4). Synthetic hair can be used for braid extensions, cornrows, and weaves. In the Ghanaian hair industry, braid extensions are created when each strand of hair is braided in twos (called "twists") or threes (called "rasta") into a person's own hair using the synthetic hair. Braids can be kept in one's hair for long period of time (Thompson, 2008: para. 4, lines 12-13). Cornrows, on the other hand, is "a braided hairstyle that follows the shape of the scalp" (Kauppinen, 2010: 9).

Wearing a weave, known as a "weave-on" in the Ghanaian hair industry, can however be fixed in three different ways. The first option is for a woman to have her hair braided into corn rolls and then sew "tracks" (strips of hair) onto the braided hair. The second option is to use the bonding method where the tracks are stuck onto the hair at the root using a special bonding glue (Thompson, 2008: para. 4, line 11). The third options is to have clip on extensions. These extensions are have pieces of hair attached with a metal clip (Extensions for All, 2013: para. 5, line 6) that are clipped into a woman's hair. However the problem with using synthetic hair to do weaves is that it does not blend in smoothly with a woman's own hair for her hair to look and feel natural.

Human hair extensions (the second type of hair extensions) on the other hand are unprocessed and are 100% human hair that is, the hair comes directly from another woman's head. These extensions are silkier than the synthetic extensions thus they blend in smoothly with a woman's own hair for her hair to look and feel natural. There are different types of these human hair extensions namely Brazilian, Indian and Peruvian hair; there are now other types such as Venezuelan and Mongolian hair being sold on the market. The price of such hair extensions are positively correlated to the length of hair (in inches) a woman wishes to buy; therefore the longer the length of the hair extensions, the more expensive it will be. A pack of human hair extensions contains either one or two 2 feet bundles of different lengths ranging between 8 to 30 inches. Women in Ghana must buy two or more packs of human hair depending on the look they are going for as well as the length and volume they want.

### **1.1 - Research Motivation**

There is not enough existing literature that explains the motives for Ghanaian women choosing to do this particular hairstyles and how it affects their perceptions of beauty. Therefore this research will provide more information about this growing trend amongst Ghanaian women.

I have observed that women in Ghana have been doing so many different hairstyles including having natural hair, an afro, jheri curls, dreadlocks, having relaxed hair, doing braids, cornrows and weaves. More recently, I have realised that majority of Ghanaian women are opting to wear human hair extensions despite its high costs. It made me wonder why majority of these women preferred this particular hairstyle as opposed to choosing cheaper hairstyle options. I was also curious to know how this

hairstyle made them feel beautiful. As a result, I decided to investigate why this was the case for most Ghanaian women.

## **1.2 – Problem Statement**

An increasing number of Ghanaian women are turning to long and silky human hair extensions to define their beauty as opposed to the other hairstyles such as braids, permed hair, or leaving their hair in its natural state. What reasons account for this preference of this hairstyle? How does the length of one's hair define a woman's perception of what makes her look beautiful?

This thesis explores these questions on women in Ghana who wear human hair extensions. Here, I focus on why these women opt to wear such hair extensions as opposed to other the other hairstyles already mentioned. It will further investigate the effects of this particular hairstyle has an effect on women's perception of beauty.

## **1.3 – Research Questions**

1. What are the motives for Ghanaian women using human hair extensions?
2. How do these hair extensions affect women's perceptions of beauty?

## **1.4 – Objectives of Study**

The objectives for this study are as follows:

1. To explore the reasons that account for Ghanaian women using Indian, Brazilian Virgin Hair, and Peruvian hair extensions.
2. To understand the perceptions of beauty that Ghanaian women associate with these hair extensions.

## **1.5 – Significance of Study**

Women in Ghana, choose to have a particular hairstyle done for many reasons which range from finances, fashion, through to just having hair that makes them comfortable with themselves. These reasons however have one common factor: women seek to attain a certain standard of beauty whether their hair is in its natural state, is relaxed, or has hair extensions. This study will provide a better understanding as to why a Ghanaian woman uses human hair extensions and how it makes her feel beautiful.

There is also not enough existing literature on the subject of Ghanaian women and their hair compared to literature on African – American women. This study is therefore useful in understanding the reasons behind a woman’s choice in her hairstyles, especially Ghanaian women. Thus it is worth examining the relationship between Ghanaian women and their choice of using hair extensions in order to gain insight into how present day women in the country see themselves beautiful, and to add to literature on Ghanaian women and their hair.

## **1.6 – Organization of study:**

This paper has been organized as follows:

**Chapter 1: Background of study** – This chapter gives background information on what beauty and hair extensions are, and the various hairstyles that Ghanaian women have been exposed to over the years.

**Chapter 2: Literature Review** – This chapter will analyse the existing literature on women and their use of human hair extensions. It also gives insight into the alternative hairstyles available to Ghanaian women apart from human hair extensions, in their quest to have “good hair.” Next, it will focus on Ghanaians perceptions of beauty and then link it to the talk about the use of human hair amongst black, African and African-American women and their perceptions of beauty. These areas will help shed more light on the motives for Ghanaian women using expensive hair extensions and how these hair extensions affect their perceptions of beauty, as these women have similar hair textures.

**Chapter 3: Methodology** – A total number of ten women were interviewed for this research. Two women were purposively selected based on the researcher’s observation of the following hairstyles over the last two years: weaves using human hair, weaves using synthetic hair, cornrows, rasta or twists (braids), relaxed (permed) hair, or natural hair. These women were between the ages of 18 and 54.

**Chapter 4: Data analysis** – The data collected was transcribed in order to group similar themes and patterns from the responses given by the respondents. These themes and patterns will give a better understanding as to why Ghanaian women wear human extensions.

**Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations** – This chapter will state, based on the data collection and analysis, some recommendations for Ghanaian women who wear human hair extension and how it affects their perceptions of beauty.

## **CHAPTER TWO - LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter will analyse the existing literature on women and their use of human hair extensions. In addition, it will shed more light on the motives for Ghanaian women using expensive hair extensions and how such extensions affect women's perceptions of beauty. The chapter starts by looking at the history of the various hairstyles mentioned earlier that Ghanaian women have been exposed to, in their quest to have "good hair." Next, it will focus on Ghanaian beauty perceptions related to hair/hairstyles and review available literature on the subject. Lastly, it will link the use of human hair extensions amongst black, African and African-American women to Ghanaian women and how it affects their perceptions of beauty.

Ghanaian women first had their hair in its natural state which is usually thicker, curlier, and often frizzier as compared to Caucasian and Asian hair (Thompson, 2008: paragraph 1, lines 3-4). Hair in its natural state means that the hair is free from any chemical treatment (Can-Tamakloe, 2011). One way they could style their natural hair was by threading, "where women would separate their hair into multiple parts and plait their hair with rounding thread around each plait" (Kauppinen, 2010: 9). During the late 1960s and early 1970s, most Ghanaian women wore their hair in an afro, where their natural hair was combed out so it stands. Women also had the option of having hair that has been locked naturally (Kauppinen, 2010: 9), popularly known as dreadlocks. Aside wearing their hair in its natural state or having dreadlocks, the jheri curl was another alternative hairstyle for Ghanaian women with natural hair. This option was available for women who did not want their hair relaxed because perming

the hair was time and labour-intensive and expensive to upkeep. The harsh mix of chemicals required for the process caused the wearer's natural hair to become extremely brittle and dry (The Fashion Bomb Daily, 2010: para. 3, line 5). However, African-American women who left hair in its natural state or let their hair grow wild or messily, or do not take proper care of it are considered loose women having little or no morals, or crazy (Patton, 2006: 29). This can be applied to Ghanaian women as they have similar hair texture to African-American women.

Thus to avoid being labelled as a woman with little or no morals, Ghanaian women started to straighten their hair. This trend was influenced by the nature of the Caucasian hair being soft and silky (Can-Tamakloe, 2011: 17). In his article, *Nappy Edges and Goldy Locks: African-American Daughters and the Politics of Hair*, Lester (2000) explains that the desire for African American women to have chemically straightened hair was rooted in the African-American slave past. Slave women found it much easier to groom their slave masters' children's hair, "which often led to internalized feelings of inferiority about the texture and alleged manageability of their own hair (Lester, 2000: 205)." These feelings of inferiority have, as a result, forced many African-American women, and Ghanaians alike, to have 'good' hair.

Thus in order to help African-American women have 'good' hair, the straightening comb was introduced to the Black community in the early 1900s. Many Black women, especially those of dark-skinned complexions with kinky hair, used the straightening comb as a way to obtain certain advantages such as securing a job and/or husband (West, 2010: 11). Byrd & Tharps (2001) state that "the straightening comb was a way to help Black

women build their confidence because the 'ideal beauty of Whiteness' was straight and wavy hair" (Byrd & Tharps, 2001: 50). Women achieved straighter, longer and silkier looking hair by "the gritty sound of burning kinky hair" (Can-Tamakloe, 2011: 17). However, the straight hair went back to its natural state once water touched it. Using the straightening comb had its disadvantages which include scalps being burnt by the hot comb, "and an overheated comb will completely burn the hair instead of straightening it" (Can-Tamakloe, 2011: 17).

Since the hot combs caused scalp burns, hair relaxers were then introduced in the 1970s to provide an easier way for women to achieve straight hair. The inventor of the hair relaxer, Garret Augustus Morgan Snr, found out that chemicals used to repair sewing machines could relaxed the curls of kinky hair. This was as a result of black women finding their natural kinky hair too tough to manage and also an internalized feeling that their hair was bad hair therefore creating a desire to have hair that is almost like that of their white counterparts (Can-Tamakloe, 2011: 4). The hair relaxing trend is referred to as "perming" amongst Ghanaian women. This process is repeated every six to eight week using hair relaxers, or "perming kits." Perming kits contain chemicals that chemically straighten or relax hair in order to make women's hair silkier. By the 1990s almost every woman in Ghana had chemically straightened her hair. This was because women who left hair in its natural state or "let their hair grow wild or messily, or do not take proper care of it are considered loose women having little or no morals, or crazy" (Patton, 2006: 29).

Interestingly, hair extension have been in existence since 3400 BC with Egyptian wigs (Vanity Hair Extensions, 2008: para. 5, line 7). It was

believed that hair extensions were used to make hair thinner but they were used as cosmetic adornment worn by both men and women. Egyptian men usually wore wigs to avoid infection of head lice (Vanity Hair Extensions, 2008: para. 4, line 4). The use of hair extensions became more and more popular in the Americas until the 1800s. During this era, women frowned upon the idea of hair extensions and left their hair out "natural until the Romantic era was in full swing when women wore elaborate Apollo knots" (Clayton, 2008: para. 3, line 5). In the 1920s, the demand for hair extensions declined until long hair extensions were introduced in the 1940s. Extensions were then used for big hair, such as the updo, amongst women in the 1960s.

Moving away from the history of the various hairstyles, I now focus attention on Ghanaian beauty perceptions related to hair/hairstyles and review available literature on the subject. Interestingly, there does not seem to be much literature or work done about Ghanaian women using human hair extensions. Searches through journals, news articles and magazines both online revealed little or no information about previous researches done on the topic. However, the few articles I found focused on how Ghanaians define beauty in terms of culture.

Kauppinen (2010) states that Ghanaians "sensitivity to beauty is culturally informed and put into action for overlapping, and contradicting, individual and collective ends" (Kauppinen, 2010: 14). She goes on to show how such "africanisation" of beauty has been localised in Ghana through beauty pageants such as "Ghana's Most Beautiful" (Kauppinen, 2010). Efo Mawugbe, Head Judge of this pageant, feels that its slogan 'Redefining Beauty to Promote National Unity,' aims at "empowering our people to take

on to themselves that power to define what beauty is" (Kauppinen, 2010: 14-15). He feels that the definition of beauty in Ghana has been severely violated by years of colonialism and western influence, and calls women dressed in exposing clothing "a lost generation" who are "copying blindly" instead of showing pride of their Africanness (Kauppinen, 2010).

Essah (2008) also supports the notion that beauty in Ghana is culturally informed. In her dissertation *Fashioning The Nation: Hairdressing, Professionalism And The Performance Of Gender In Ghana, 1900-2006*, she writes:

Through the study of the relationships between hairdressing and professionalism the dissertation discusses how between 1920 and 1970, hairdressing contributed in forming the gender and age-based identity of women and men in urban areas and identified the ranks of persons who participated in state and national ceremonies that Ghanaians appreciated as visual icons of "cultural nationalism," "African Nationalism," "African pride," and pan-Africanism. Since hairdressings expressed the symbolic systems of national identity, the meanings attributed to hairdressings serve as texts to identify intellectual, socio-cultural and economic practices and discourses through which men and women in Ghana fashioned citizenship (p. 1-2).

Thus as a hairdresser (one who should be able to do all the hairstyle options in discussion) you should be able to style a man or a woman's hair in such a way that it reflects the sense of culture, nationalism and pride in a Ghanaian man or woman. Kauppinen (2010) mentions how "Real African beauty" as opposed to "Western beauty" has recently become a debated issue from African American popular culture to West-Africa (p. 14). This means that more West African women are succumbing to the idea of the European ideal of beauty.

As a result, the literature found on the women and hair extensions relates to black, and African-American women in the Western World. It

analyses their use of human hair extensions and their perceptions of beauty, which can then be related to Ghanaian women because of their similar hair texture. African American women often compare their skin complexion and hair texture to the predominantly White images in evaluating their perceived attractiveness (Parker et al, 1995: 103). However, I will focus on the hair texture aspect of their perceived attractiveness.

Intentionally or unintentionally, hair makes a political statement (Patton, 2006: 40). Europeans, during their adventures on the Western coast of Africa in the mid-1400s, had "braids, plaits, patterns shaved into the scalp, and any combination of shells, flowers, beads, or strips of material woven into the hair" (Byrd and Tharps, 2001:9). Byrd and Tharps (2001) talk about how hair was not only a cosmetic concern during this period, but "its social, aesthetic, and spiritual significance has been intrinsic to their sense of being whites for thousands of years" (p.7).

Women with straightened hair are still considered the beauty norm in African American society today (Bellinger, 2007: 65). Straight, long hair is often times referred to as "good" hair, whereas tight, kinky and curly hair (the hair texture of most Black women in its natural state) is considered "nappy." According to Weitz (2001), "the three most common standards of White beauty in the United States that women are subject to include: women's hair should be long, curly or wavy—not kinky—and preferably blond; women's hair should look styled—this requires money and time; and women's hair should look feminine and different from men's hair (Weitz, 2001: 672). Thus in order to get the long hair their White counterparts had, Black women felt they were "obligated to purchase hair extensions to

achieve the ideal look” (West, 2012:11). On the other hand, maintaining a natural (non-straightened) hairstyle can be viewed as unattractive and undignified in both Black and White cultures (Byrd & Tharps, 2001).

These ideal standards of hair for black women were crucial in the professional world. Bellinger (2007), citing from Dione-Rosado (2004), discusses how relaxed hair, braids, weaves, and shortly cropped hair are considered more professional in nature, and hence they are adopted by middle class women more often. Contrarily, supposed natural hairstyles (i.e. dreadlocks and twists) are viewed as more radical hairstyles in the professional world (p.67). Therefore it was necessary for Black women to have long silky hair should they want to get a good job that paid them well. As a result, many Black and African- American are spending a lot of money on their hair just so they can appear beautiful in society. However, Patton (2006) states that “adopting many White European traits was essential to survival, e.g., free versus slave; employed versus unemployed; educated versus uneducated; upper class versus poor” (p. 28). The topic of hair straightening became hotly contested in the Black community (Patton, 2006), as the practise was viewed as “a pitiful attempt to emulate Whites and equated hair straightening with self-hatred and shame” (Bryd & Tharps, 2001: 37). Lester (2000) notes how African Americans, even within their families, “rate each other and themselves on the "good" and "bad" hair scale where "good" hair is perceived as the hair closest to white people's hair--long, straight, silky, bouncy, manageable, healthy, and shiny; while "bad" hair is short, matted, kinky, nappy, coarse, brittle, and wooly” (Lester, 2000: 204).

Patton (2006), establishes the fact that “as girls grow and mature and become women, one of the only items over which they have control is their hair” (Patton, 2006: 37). She goes on to explain that perhaps girls focus on beauty to “appear attractive to the opposite sex or play the role for which women are socialized—concern for beauty” (Patton, 2006: 37). Whatever the reason girls have to appear attractive, “hair becomes such a major preoccupation for adolescent girls of both races that their self-esteem can actually rise and fall with every glance in the mirror” (Wilson and Russell, 1996: 81). These are all attempts to ensure that Black and African American women conform to White standard of beauty, “especially since one common U.S. societal stereotype is the belief that Black women fail to measure up to the normative standard” (Patton, 2006: 24).

Beauty is one of the defining characteristics of a woman (Patton, 2006:39). Historically, a black woman’s image has always been subjected to scrutinization. It is for this reason that “black women have undergone many pressures that shaped their hair choices in various ways” (King and Niabaly, 2012: 2). Women and girls are therefore persistently striving to become beautiful and will use a variety of different mediums to achieve this (James, 2013: 3-4). As a result, they consider every choice they make about their hair and body important (King and Niabaly, 2012: 2).

The media has also has a significant influence on a black or African-American woman’s perception of beauty. Swain (2012), in the dissertation *Negotiating Beauty Ideals: Perceptions of Beauty among Black Female University Students*, explains the role the media plays in this. She states:

In a given evening of television watching, one encounters countless cosmetic advertisements for make-up, hair-enhancing shampoos and conditioners, anti-wrinkle creams, skin firming lotions, face creams that reduce dark spots and even out the skin tone, sunless tan lotions and

sprays, hair dyes, hair relaxers, and other items that are all targeted towards women. Within these advertisements and other images presented to women in fashion and celebrity magazines, movies, and television, the aesthetic ideal is defined and reinforced (p.1).

These advertisements only make a black or African-American woman feel insecure about her physical looks. Therefore her buying some of the items in the advertisements will enhance her beauty so she is can conform to the White ideal standards of beauty, in order to feel as beautiful as the women used in the advertisements.

Patton (2006) also supports Swain's on how the media affects the perception of beauty of a Black or African-American woman. She points out that "many African American women who were glorified for their beauty tend to be lighter-skinned women who have long, wavy hair" (p.39). She explained that this reification of the beauty standard did not come from only the African-American community but the Euro American community, which promotes the acceptable standard of beauty (Patton, 2006). Although there are exceptions such as Tyra Banks, Naomi Campbell, Tomiko, and Alex Wek, "the media may promote or single out a more Eurocentric-looking model because Euro American standards of beauty are paramount and mediated standards of beauty promote adherence to whiteness" (Patton, 2006: 39).

Patton (2006) goes on further to explain that "the performance of beauty comes to us through a variety of mediated images that we are bombarded with daily" (Patton, 2006:39). This therefore support's Swain's take on the media and their role in a woman's perception of beauty as the "messages of beauty largely encompass ways in which women can make themselves look better, skin products that can tone, redefine, and take away age" (Patton, 2006:39). Miller, Gleaves, Hirsch, Green, Snow and Corbett (2000) however state that black women may be affected by an

idealized skin complexion and hair texture present in media images, as many Black women are not happy with their skin complexion and hair texture. For black women, their standard of attractiveness is determined by hair texture, hair length, and skin complexion. Black women may internalize an "ideal Whiteness of beauty" with regard to a light-skinned complexion and long, straight, or wavy hair texture (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003).

Aside body features, women consider weight to be a standard of attractiveness or beauty. White women's standards of attractiveness are strongly related to weight satisfaction; they feel that in order to be attractive, one needs to be extremely thin. However, Black women are less dependent on weight satisfaction when defining standards of attractiveness (Flynn & Fitzgibbon, 1998: 21). Flynn and Fitzgibbon (1998) go on further to establish the point for black women, "...attractiveness is based not only on the shape and size of the body, but also on how a woman or girl presents herself. Presentation includes grooming, dress, posture, and whether she walks and moves as though she is proud of herself and her culture" (p. 21). In addition, being well-groomed, which means attending to one's hair and skin, and being well-dressed, neat and clean add to the standard of attractiveness within the Black community. Therefore black beauty revolves around self-presentation to the public and overall attractiveness (West, 2012: 9). From personal observation, these are the same ideas Ghanaian women have about beauty; it revolves around self-presentation to the public and overall attractiveness. As a result, Ghanaian women spend long hours in hair salons just so they can see themselves as presentable and attractive in society.

This chapter began by taking a look at the different hairstyles that Ghanaian women have been exposed to over the years. It then analysed Ghanaians perception on beauty, in term of culture, as there was not enough literature on my topic of research. As a result, I used literature on Black and African American woman and their use of human hair extensions, as well as their perception of beauty and link it to the case of Ghanaian women. Therefore this research will provide more information on Ghanaian women and their use of human hair extensions and how this particular hairstyle affects their perceptions of beauty.

## **CHAPTER THREE - METHODOLOGY**

### **3.0 – Research Purpose**

This research was exploratory in nature as it sought to find new insights into the phenomena of why Ghanaian women have been wearing human hair extensions as opposed to other hairstyles. It also explores how human hair extensions affect the beauty perceptions of Ghanaian women.

### **3.1 – Research Design**

I used qualitative data for this study. "Qualitative research is empirical research where data is not in the form of numbers" (Punch, 1998: 4, as cited by Hughes, 2006). Denzin and Lincoln (1994) (as cited by Hughes, 2006), describe qualitative data as being multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. They state further that "Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials - case study, personal experience, introspective, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts - that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives" (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994: 2) (as cited by Hughes, 2006). Therefore the use of qualitative data, specifically interviews, allowed me to explore and analyse the data I collected. It gave me a deeper understanding as to why Ghanaian women wear human hair extensions, identify key themes or patterns from the data collected (Saunders et al, 2007: 479) and make conclusions.

Initially, I planned to collect the data for my research using focus group interviews. "A focus group could be defined as a group of interacting

individuals having some common interest or characteristics, brought together by a moderator, who uses the group and its interaction as a way to gain information about a specific or focused issue” (Marczak and Sewell, no year). I thought it was best to use focus group interviews so I can take “advantage of the fact that people naturally interact and are influenced by others” (Marczak and Sewell, no year). Using the responses from my respondents in the group, I could have obtained a deeper levels of meaning, made important connections, and identified subtle nuances (Marczak and Sewell, no year), as to why Ghanaian women wear human hair extensions, as compared to other survey methods. Such groups would also have allowed respondents to hear the points others made and “trigger ideas or responses they wouldn’t have thought of by themselves” (Trochim, 2005: 94). This would have allowed me to make clarifications, ask follow-up questions, and probe further into the responses I would have been given.

However, I had challenges with conducting a focus group interview. First of all, I was not able to get enough women to participate; majority of them were not interested in participating. With the three who were willing to participate, it was hard for me to find a suitable time for all of us to meet on the day I suggested (a Saturday). As a result, I decided to conduct interviews. These conversations were useful as I was looking for in-depth information on the topic of Ghanaian women and their use of human hair extensions. In addition, they are a great way of getting a sample of what people thought and felt about this issue (Community Tool Box, 2013).

I specifically used one-on-one interviews for my research as was the best way to obtain accurate and thorough communication of ideas between myself and the person from whom I am gathering information. I had control

of which question(s) to ask and when which ensured that all the questions I asked were answered. The one-on-one interviews also allowed me to be more flexible in the sense that I probed further for specific answers, repeated questions, and used discretion as to the particular questions I asked. (Community Tool Box, 2013). In addition, I benefited from the spontaneity of the interview process as respondents did not have the luxury of going away to think about or censor their responses. (Community Tool Box, 2013).

I used open ended questions to interview the respondents. These types of questions “refer to those questions for which the response patterns or answer categories are provided by the respondent, not the interviewer” (Frey, 2013: para. 1, line 3). Using such questions allowed respondents to give me an unlimited number of possible answers to the questions I asked. Respondents also gave me their answers in detail, as well as qualified and clarified their responses. The nature of the questions permitted respondents to be creative and express themselves in their responses. These revealed a respondent’s logic, thinking process and frame of reference (Frey, 2013: para. 2, line 5). In addition, these questions revealed different perspectives on the subject that has not yet been considered as the subject of hair ties into various aspects of life (Can-Tamakloe, 2011: 26). There were a total of ten questions I asked my respondents my female.

The questions asked were grouped into three main categories. The first category had introduction questions to help me understand the relationship between my respondents and their hair type (where hair type refers to the respondent’s hair being relaxed or in its natural state). The next category consisted of the main questions I asked my respondents

which gave me a deeper understanding as to why Ghanaian women prefer wearing human hair extensions as opposed to the other hairstyles available. I also obtained more information as to why Ghanaian women prefer one hairstyle over other, and how that particular hairstyle affects their perception of who a beautiful woman is. Lastly, the questions in the conclusion category allowed respondents to express their opinions on whether Ghanaian women should continue to wear such hair extensions. I also asked (or interviewed) five male respondents three open-ended questions to get a sense of their knowledge about human hair extensions, their reactions to women who wear them, and if they perceived women to be beautiful when they wore these extensions.

Prior to the face-to-face interviews, I interviewed 2 owners of hair salons and 2 suppliers of human hair extensions. Initially, I wanted to interview 3 owners of hair salons but it was difficult finding a time that was convenient for me to interview the owner. I asked each hair supplier and each hair salon owner six and nine questions respectively. The questions were all open-ended. The purpose of the visit to the hair salon owners and suppliers of human hair extensions is to provide me with in-depth knowledge of both the hair and human hair extensions industry in Ghana. Secondly, through such informal interactions, I gained a better understanding as to why Ghanaian women are wearing such human hair extensions.

### **3.2 - Scouting for respondents**

These one-on-one interviews were supposed to be with twelve women who are 18 years and above. I purposively selected two women in each of the hairstyle categories below based on my observations of the hairstyles

that they have been doing. In addition, I had different views and opinions from each of the two women, as opposed to having one woman represent each hair category. However, I was only able to interview 10 of the 12 women because it was difficult finding working women who had their hair in cornrows and in braids. Six out of the ten were students of Ashesi University College, while the remaining were working women (two of them were also from Ashesi University College). The hairstyles these women do are in the following six categories:

1. Weaves with human hair extensions
2. Weaves with synthetic hair extensions
3. Braids (rasta or twists)
4. Cornrows
5. Relaxed (or permed) hair
6. Natural hair

I picked the age range of 18 years and above because different age groups have different economic status, different taste in fashion and perceptions of beauty. I also picked these six hair categories based on my observation over the past ten years of the most popular hairstyles amongst women in Accra.

I approached female students in Ashesi University College as well as working women who either had their hair already done in one of the six hairstyles categories mentioned earlier, or women who I had observed wear these hairstyles for over two years. I informed these potential respondents about my research and requested that I interview them on their hairstyle choices vis-à-vis my research focus.

In addition, four out of five of the male respondents I interviewed were from Ashesi University College. They were a mixture of students and working men at the university. The fifth male respondent was a working man outside of the university. I chose these men based on my personal observation of their interaction with women. I also informed these potential respondents about my research and requested that I interview them vis-à-vis my research focus.

### **3.3 - Data analysis and representation**

I voice recorded the interviews with my respondents as well as hair salon owners and human hair extension suppliers. The various responses I received were transcribed, "that is, reproduced as a written account using actual words" (Saunders, Lewis, Thornhill, 2007: 475). Transcribing the recordings shed light on not just the responses the respondents gave me but how they said their responses as well (Saunders, Lewis, Thornhill, 2007). I then read my transcript over and over again to identify the major and minor themes from my respondents. The major themes were the most common ideas about human hair extensions given by the respondents. The minor themes, on the other hand, were the ideas that were not mentioned by majority of the respondents.

### **3.4 – Limitations of Study**

For the sake of convenience, majority of the men and women in my study were from Ashesi University College. However, there are several other men and women in tertiary institutions and in the working world whom I could have approached to ask them to participate in my research. I could have obtained more ideas or themes regarding my research.

Also, some of the women I approached were not willing to participate in my research. However for those women who agreed to participate, timing was a limitation. I needed to ensure that I found a time that best suits both the respondent and myself for the interview to take place.

In addition, some of the women may not have fully understood the questions I asked. As a result, I may have received responses that were specific to the questions I asked.

## **CHAPTER FOUR – DATA ANALYSIS**

This chapter will analyse and interpret the responses from my male and female respondents. It will identify similar themes or ideas these men and women have about human hair extensions. In addition, these themes or ideas will be linked to responses from interviews with hair salon owners and human hair extension suppliers. These themes have been divided into two groups – major themes and minor themes - in order to shed more light as to why Ghanaian women are wearing human hair extensions.

### **4.0 – Major Themes**

One of the major themes that emerged from the interviews with the respondents on the use of hair extensions relates to desire, in spite of the prohibitive costs associated with such hairs, to publicly look good all the time. Therefore one of the main reasons why Ghanaian women are choosing to wear human hair extensions is so they look **presentable**. One of the relaxed hair respondents stated that depending on the style of the human hair extensions and not just the extensions itself, a woman may look sophisticated, unkempt, or classy. Out of these, Ghanaian women would prefer to look sophisticated and classy because of their desire to look good all the time.

In Ghanaian families, women are to look presentable at all times. This is also evident in the literature as families, "rate each other and themselves on the "good" and "bad" hair scale where "good" hair is perceived as the hair closest to white people's hair--long, straight, silky, bouncy, manageable, healthy, and shiny; while "bad" hair is short, matted, kinky, nappy, coarse, brittle, and wooly" (Lester, 2000: 204)

According to the hair owners and hair suppliers, the price of human hair extensions are dependent of the length of hair, varying between 8 inches and 32 inches that a woman wants. These extensions cost between GHS 160.00 and GHS 700.00 at one of the hair suppliers' store. At the other hair supplier's store, they have hair that starts from GHS 70.00 all the way up to GHS 500.00. One hair salon owner also add that human hair extensions can cost between \$100.00 and \$700.00 and yet women are still buying these extensions. In addition, the extensions are sold in bundles thus a woman needs to buy three or more bundles, depending on the look she wants. Therefore a woman pays more money for more than three bundles of human hair. Her desire to look classy, sophisticated with high levels of prestige is good in the professional world.

This supports the discussion on how relaxed hair, braids, weaves, and shortly cropped hair are considered more professional in nature, and hence adopted by middle class women more often. Therefore it was necessary for Black women to have long silky hair should they want to get a good job that paid them well. However, one of the respondents with relaxed hair felt that Ghanaian women had very beautiful hair and yet spend a lot of money on extensions. She further explains how a woman can change her look or her hairstyle without spending so much money, and still have the social desire to look good.

As with all the other hairstyles mentioned, Ghanaian women are wearing human hair extensions for **convenience and maintenance purposes**. Both women who wore human hair extensions explained that these hair extensions allowed them to be on the move at all times. One went further to explain that having human hair extensions was more

convenient for her because she is a busy person thus the extensions give her a break from having to stand in the mirror every morning to comb and tidy up her hair. In addition, the extensions do not have an effect on her normal hair (which is relaxed); if she wanted to curl or straighten her hair, she could do it on the human hair without having to worry about the state of her normal hair. According to one of the hair salon owners, human hair extensions, if kept well, can stay in a woman's hair for up to two months. As a result, like one of the human hair respondents said, women can worry less about the state of their normal and focus on her activities for the day.

Human hair extensions are considered **an investment** to majority of the female respondents. A human hair supplier felt that if women are going to spend money on any kind of hair and want it to last for a duration of time it would only make sense to invest in human hair. She goes on to explain that in any industry, no matter how much struggling is going on, every woman is going to get her hair done. A hair salon owner also elaborates on the fact that if a woman fixes a weave, depending on how well she keeps it, she can have it on for up to two months. Mathematically, if you buy other brands of human hair, you will spend over GHS2000-3000 a year, if you are buying it every three months. However buying quality human hair from the stores of this hair supplier means a woman buy the extensions once spends about GHS 900.00 for the one time investment in their highest brand and it will last you longer than any of those other hairs will last you.

Without the weave, one hair salon owner advised women with relaxed hair to wash their hair every week because of the dust and sweat that would have accumulated during the week. At her hair salon, it costs GHS 15.00 for women with relaxed hair to have a hair wash thus per year,

it would cost GHS 840.00. Touch-ups for women with natural hair cost GHS 30.00 every 7 weeks with her own hair relaxing kit. Therefore the total cost for a woman with relaxed hair per annum is GHS 1080.00. As shown, the cost of a woman keeping her hair relaxed is higher than if she wears a weave with human hair extensions. As a result, women are trying to save money by investing in such hair extensions.

Aside the convenience and maintenance and investment factors, women wear human hair extensions because of the **state of their own hair** (either relaxed or natural). According to one of the hair salon owners, there aren't many good hair salons in Accra thus women go in for human hair extensions to make up for their bad hair. There is also a problem with the water supply. Salons use a lot of salty water to wash their clients' hair which can break a woman's hair thus making it easier for women to fix weaves. For women who wear these extensions regularly, she also explains that the cornrows can pull her hair if they are too tight. Eventually a woman's hair line keeps receding from the front, the back and the sides, and she gets bumps as well. When women keep covering their hair, the hair does not get the necessary air and treatment it should be getting. The hair has not been rinsed or washed, and the accumulation of dandruff, dust and sweat mixed together are not good for the hair. It ends up weakening a woman's hair. As a result, women will not leave their own hair because they have become so use to the human hair extensions, it is now their look.

In terms of **beauty perceptions**, the respondents who wore human hair extensions felt these extensions affected their confidence level and the way they interact with others because they know they look good. Therefore a woman's confidence level in a sense reflects her self-perception of beauty.

On the contrary, some male respondents had mixed reactions on whether or not human hair extensions makes a woman beautiful. Some felt women were not appreciative of the physical features that God had given to them. Others thought that human hair extensions suited some women depending on how they styled the extensions. However, majority of them felt women looked more beautiful in braid extension or when they left their normal hair (relaxed or natural) as opposed to when they had human hair extensions in their hair. These are all attempts to ensure that Black and African American women, and Ghanaian women, conform to White standard of beauty, “especially since one common U.S. societal stereotype is the belief that Black women fail to measure up to the normative standard” (Patton, 2006: 24).

#### **4.1 – Minor themes**

Besides the major themes discussed, there were some minor but significant themes that emerged from my interviews. One such theme relates to how Ghanaian women wear human hair extensions for **special occasions** such as weddings. Both suppliers of human hair extensions confirmed that women do come in to buy human hair extensions for special occasions. However, one of them stated that those who came in to buy the extension for such purposes have now become clients and are now buying the extensions to wear on a daily basis.

Another minor but important theme is the **availability** of human hair extensions. According to one hair supplier, women had to find a specific supplier who knew exactly where to get these human hair extensions from in order to get it access. Now, the access to these extensions are now more

prevalent. One hair salon owner clarifies that there are many stores in the markets and in suburbs such as Osu and Labone that sell human hair extensions in bulk. Thus the availability of these hair extensions are catering to the increasing demand for these extensions among Ghanaian women.

Although human hair extensions have been in existence for a long time, Ghanaian women did not know about them. As a result of technology and globalization, which has been discussed in the literature review, Ghanaian women now have more **knowledge** about human hair extensions. This is another reason why they are opting to wear such hair extensions. One of the suppliers of human hair explained that this has led to a very significant change in the consumer pattern as now everybody is conscious about saving and people want more value for their money. Therefore Ghanaian women are beginning to understand the value they get when they buy human hair extensions. Spending money on such quality hair means it will last longer and they can use it over and over again. On the other hand, she would have to buy synthetic hair every week or every two weeks because it does not last as long as human hair extensions.

The hair suppliers and salon owners defined human hair as hair that comes straight from one donor, or another woman's head, and is unprocessed. One of the hair suppliers elaborated how different cultures have different hair lengths and hair textures but the most popular human hair extensions in Ghana are Indian, Peruvian, Malaysian and Brazilian hair. Interestingly, majority of the male respondents know that Brazilian and Indian human hair extensions are the most popular hair extensions used by Ghanaian women.

According to the same hair supplier, the water or food that women in these regions (India, Peru, Malaysia and Brazil) have still allows them to have healthy hair even though they do not have access to luxurious foods. This in turn has an effect on the quality and the grade of the human hair. There are different grades of human hair as well – grade 5A, 6A, 3, and 4 - so the higher the grade, the better the quality and the silkiness of the hair. Thus it is the quality and texture of human hair extensions that make Ghanaian women wear human hair extensions.

A couple of the female respondents mentioned their fear for cutting their relaxed hair but it was long. According to one of the hair salon owners, there is a perception in Ghana that the longer your hair, the more beautiful a woman looks. Hence Ghanaian women are always trying to get longer hair in order to look more beautiful. Another respondent also expressed her desire to have to the same hair texture as a white (or Caucasian) woman just so she did not have to do much to her hair in the mornings. This supports the literature that African-American women, and to that extent Ghanaian women, consider good hair to be long and silky like their Caucasian counterparts. Therefore the **length and texture** of human hair extensions is another reason why women are opting to have this particular hairstyle.

Data collected reveals that Ghanaian women wear human hair extensions for convenience and maintenance purposes, to boost their confidence levels, and because of the length of texture of these extensions. These major and minor themes discussed above have helped in understanding why Ghanaian women are opting to wear human hair extensions as opposed to the other hairstyles available to them. It also

gives insight as to how these extensions affect a Ghanaian woman's perception of beauty.

## **CHAPTER FIVE – CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This chapter provides an outline of the findings of the study and draws conclusions with respect to the data presented. Furthermore, the researcher spells out some important recommendations for women who wear human hair extensions.

### **5.0 – Recommendations**

The data collected proves that women generally want to their hair to look good which in turns affects their confidence level, as well as the way they look and feel about themselves. However, Ghanaian women are opting to wear human hair extensions because of the nature of their own hair as well as their desire to investment in good, quality hair. Such quality hair can cost up to GHS 900.00 (or even \$700.00) yet Ghanaian women are still buying quality human hair extensions. One of the suppliers of these extensions jokingly said “Even if women have to steal money, they would do so just to get human hair.” Therefore if a woman wants to wear human hair within her financial constraints, she should buy human hair fibre extensions, which are of good quality (to an extent) and are, of course, cheaper (ranges between GHS 35.00 – GHS 75.00 depending on the desired length of hair).

Like one respondent said, “I think that you can change your look sometimes without spending so much money.” Thus women who wear such extensions can also consider doing other hairstyles that will not cost as much. At the end of the day, your hairstyle should still make you look and

feel good; no one would how much it cost you to have a particular hairstyle done as long as it is within your budget.

In addition, Ghanaian women should begin to embrace the normal hair, whether natural or relaxed, instead of settling for the White ideal standard of having long, silky hair. Accepting the White ideal standard of beauty will only make Ghanaian women feel more inferior about her looks hence affecting her confidence level.

Every woman's confidence level differs. Therefore in order for all Ghanaian women to become self-confident and in the process, use words such as beautiful and gorgeous to describe her looks, the institutions of work and family should allow Ghanaian women to express their beauty through any hairstyle they want to do. These institutions restrict the hairstyles a woman can do so she can conform to having hair like her Caucasian counterparts in order to look presentable in society.

One of the hair salon owners mentioned that a woman's own hair (relaxed or natural) does not last long when it has been freshly done because of the humid weather in Ghana. As a result, women are opting to wear human hair extensions so they protect their hair from humidity. This is understandable however women should not do these extensions regularly. Like most of the respondents said, I would recommend women who wear such extensions regularly to allow their hair pores to breathe. A woman's hair needs to be washed and treated in order for her own hair to remain healthy. Thus constantly wearing human hair extensions damages a woman's own hair because they cornrows may be tight which leads to her hair line receding. Consequently, having damaged hair may affect a

woman's sense of beauty which makes her feel that she needs to have extensions in her hair to regain her self-confidence.

## **5.1 – Conclusions**

Prior to gathering data from my respondents, I conducted interviews with hair salon owners and suppliers of human hair extensions to get a better understanding of human hair and its use among Ghanaian women. Ghanaian women started switching from using synthetic hair to human hair extensions about two years ago. This switch has led to also led a significant change in the consumer pattern for human hair because now women are becoming more conscious about saving and want more value for their money. Therefore if a woman is spending more money on quality hair, it will last longer than if she spends money on synthetic hair which she will have to keep buying every week or every two weeks.

The objectives of this thesis was to find out the reasons why women in Accra were opting to wear human hair extensions, as opposed to other hairstyles. It found out that despite its high costs, women use human hair extensions for convenience and maintenance purposes, the desire to have long and silky hair, the poor state of their own hair (relaxed or perm), and because it is an investment. In addition, the paper wanted to understand how these extensions affect a woman's perception of beauty. Data shows that women who wear such extensions usually walk and talk with confidence because they know their hair looks good.

The literature at the beginning of this thesis suggested that African-American women, and by extension, African women, felt that good hair had to be long and silky, like their Caucasian counterparts. This thesis found

that Ghanaian women in Accra do feel the need to have long hair in order to feel beautiful. Some respondents were scared of cutting their long hair while one wished she had long hair. Another respondent also wished her hair texture was the same as Caucasian hair just so she could wet her hair in the mornings leave it in that state.

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## **Appendix 1 - Questions used for Female Respondents**

### ***Introduction Questions:***

1. How long have you had your hair in this state? / How long have you been doing this particular hairstyle?
2. Is it regularly kept in this state? Why?
3. How often do you change your hairstyle? Is there a reason the change?

### ***Main Questions:***

4. Have you ever considered wearing human hair extensions? Why or why not?
5. What do you think about human hair extensions? What do you think of women who regularly wear human hair extensions? How would you describe a woman that wears human hair extensions?
6. What makes a woman beautiful to you on the outside?
7. What role does hair have to play in terms of making a woman feel beautiful?
8. How does the hairstyle you have make you feel beautiful?
9. If you were given the opportunity to change your current hairstyle, which hairstyle will you choose and why? How would your new hairstyle make you feel beautiful?

### ***Conclusion Questions:***

10. Would you encourage Ghanaian women to continue wearing human hair extensions? Why or why not?

## **Appendix 2 - Questions used for Hair Suppliers**

1. Have you noticed women moving away from synthetic hair to human hair extensions over the last two years?
2. What types of human hair extensions do you sell? How much do they cost?
3. Do women usually purchase human hair extensions for special events or do they purchase it for regular everyday use?
4. Why do you think women are starting to wear human hair extensions?
5. How do you think human hair makes a woman feel beautiful?
6. Would you encourage Ghanaian women to continue to use human hair extensions? Why or why not?

### **Appendix 3 – Questions used for Hair Salon owners**

1. Can you please give me a general overview of the hair industry in Ghana?
2. Is the hair industry profitable, especially human hair extensions?
3. What are the various classes of women who do their hair at your hair salon?
4. Do you sell hair extensions in your salon? How much do you sell them for?
5. How much does it cost to have these extensions fixed at your salon?
6. How many of your clients come in regularly to have human hair extensions fixed into their hair?
7. Why do you think women are using human hair extensions more frequently?
8. How do you think it affects their perceptions of beauty?
9. Should women continue to use these extensions? Why or why not?

#### **Appendix 4 – Questions used for Male Respondents**

1. What do you know about human hair extensions?
2. What are your reactions to women who wear these extensions?
3. Do you think a woman looks beautiful when she wears such extensions? Why or why not?