

# **Nappily Ever After: A Theoretical Analysis of Black Women's Hair in Film**

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## **Academic Abstract**

This thesis will examine the film *Nappily Ever After* (Al-Mansour, 2018). I will use the communication theory of identity (CTI) as a theoretical framework to analyze the film. My CTI analysis will depict how hair affects a Black female character's life in terms of her identity. My thesis will use the CTI layers, which include personal, enacted, relational, and communal, to evaluate the film. The film is organized into five parts that describe how the main character's hair changes during a pivotal period of her life: Straighten, Weave, Blonde, Bald, and New Growth. Ultimately, the thesis explores how the main character evolves to be more comfortable with herself as her hairstyles change throughout the film.

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## **General Audience Abstract**

This study uses Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) to examine the movie *Nappily Ever After* (2018). Hair has played a significant role in Black history; however, it is often overlooked how it plays into identity. Using CTI to examine the film shows the different layers of identity; the thesis shows how hair can play a crucial role in some Black women's identities.

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## Ch. 1 Introduction

Hair is important for cultural, historical, or personal reasons. Some hair, such as straight hair, is more glorified in the mass media (Mills, 2019). In this thesis, mass media refers to traditional news and journalistic outlets as well as to television shows, movies, and music videos (Cheers, 2018). The mass media still underrepresents coarse, kinky hair, typically associated with brown or darker-skinned Black women (Ellington, 2023). Thus, Black women grow up in a society where some people see their hair as less desirable or valuable – especially when they wear their hair in natural, kinky (e.g., Afrocentric) styles that do not reflect the straight-hair norm that is seen in the mass media.

To achieve social acceptance or assimilate into the straight-hair norm, many Black women use sculpting and straightening techniques (Teteh et al., 2019). At the same time, some women enjoy the flexibility of wearing their hair in a natural style one day and in a straight style the next, capitalizing on the malleability of Black hair texture and the ability to transform it into any number of styles they desire (Mercer, 2000). Different Afrocentric hairstyles are increasingly represented positively in the mass media and society. Over time the narrative about Black women's hair in the mass media has been changing.

This thesis will explore the dynamics of Black women's hair in society by examining the film *Nappily Ever After* (Al-Mansour, 2018). *Nappily Ever After* is based on the novel by Trisha R. Thomas in 2000. The film is a new school fairy tale, meaning the female protagonist does not end up with a romantic partner at the end. Instead, she ends up happy with her natural hair and herself. The film focuses on how Black women have different experiences with their hair in society. The film also shows how hair impacts a Black woman's life in identity, relationships, and societal expectations.

I will use the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) to examine the main character's identity in relation to her experiences in the film. CTI describes identity and how a person's identity is tied to their relationships. CTI has several different layers: personal, enacted, relational, and communal. I will examine each layer in terms of the main character's identity and experiences in the film. In particular, I will analyze how her identity, relationships, and societal expectations change on each layer. Thus, this thesis will use CTI theory as a theoretical framework to analyze the film *Nappily Ever After* (Al-Mansour, 2018).

Exploring the subject of Black women's hair is essential because it plays a significant role in the lives of many Black women, affecting their identity, relationships, and societal expectations. The individual, cultural, and social impact of hair is not unique to Black women, and this study opens up the door for further research on Black women's hair and how other identity groups and cultures experience their hair.

The thesis begins with a literature review that covers the history of Black people's hair and representation. It also describes the film *Nappily Ever After* and core aspects of CTI. After the literature review, I present the methods section. The methods section describes how I use CTI to analyze the film. Following the methods section, I conduct my CTI analysis of the film, offer a brief discussion, and then conclude.

## **Ch. 2 Literature Review**

### **A Brief History of Black Hair**

Before the transatlantic slave trade, the hair of Africans was glorified, decorated and molded into a variety of styles (Ellington, 2023). Hair was critical to African societies. Different designs communicated identity, power, and prestige. It also indicated the status within and of multiple African tribes and villages. Before the slave trade, Black hair had cultural and spiritual

meanings, such as a person's tribe, social status, and family background. Some of the most commonly worn hairstyles were Zulu knots, Bantu knots, twists, braids, Nubian knots, and dreadlocks (Thompson, 2009). These styles are often referred to as "natural" or "Afrocentric" because, unlike straight hairstyles, they emphasize the natural kink or curl of Black hair textures. Through slavery, Black hair was framed as unattractive by Europeans, who dehumanized it as wool (Thompson, 2019). In the eighteenth century in Europe, wigs were worn by White men of the upper class. Enslaved African people, forced to labor for the White upper class, would take turns wearing wigs, and the enslaved people who worked for the lower class would shape their hair to look like wigs. Sometimes, enslaved people wore wigs given to them by their masters as a status to represent their master's wealth at the time (White & White, 1995). Additionally, if enslaved people tried to escape, escapees could be described by their hair and by the wig, increasing their chances of being found and brought back to their master (White & White, 1995).

During the slave trade, Black women's connection to their hair changed. In some cases, hair became a means of survival. African women would braid rice into their hair just in case they were caught by slavers and put on a slave ship (Carney, 2017). Doing this would allow them to have food; if they escaped, they could grow their own rice crop (Carney, 2017). Additionally, once enslaved, Black people had insufficient time to engage in traditional styling rituals. Black women often wore scarves to protect themselves from the sun and heat, which went hand in hand with working in the field all day. The circumstances of enslavement made their hair knotted, tangled, and unmanageable (Thompson, 2009).

Even after the abolition of slavery in the late 19th century, society framed Black hair as unattractive, unprofessional, and unmanageable. During this time, many Black people had few hairstyling products. However, in 1905, Madame CJ Walker created products designed for Black

hair, such as Wonderful Hair Grower, Glossine, and Vegetable Shampoo (Bundles, 2002). Then she started selling metal combs that were heated on a stove, called hot combs, and used to straighten hair. Madam C.J. Walker's 1905 hair softener, which came with a hot comb, was the first hair product developed by Black people and sold to Black people (Thompson, 2009). The combs were made with wider teeth than traditional combs (Bundles, 2002). This kind of comb made it easier to straighten kinky or curly hair.

During this time, Black people started straightening their hair to conform to European beauty standards (Thompson, 2009). They employed a method known as "hair pressing," which is when a person's hair is straightened with a hot comb. Hair pressing became a ritual of Black women's culture of intimacy (Bell, 2007). Hair pressing is an intimate moment because allowing someone to touch your hair is a personal experience. Hair pressing was a personal and intimate experience because one woman would wash, detangle, and straighten another woman's hair. This practice created a sense of community in Black women's salons or in the home-based kitchens where hair was often done. Black women who knew each other as well as those who were perfect strangers would come together, talk, and listen to one another in these hair-pressing environments (Bell, 2007). While those moments of hair pressing were precious and created intimate moments, over time, trends started to change with Black people's hair. It went from hair pressing to hair fluffing. The bigger the hair, the better.

In the 1920s, straight hair was considered middle-class. Hairstyles like the conk emerged in the 1940s to imitate Western culture (Mercer, 2000). The conk was for men with kinky or curly hair; they would straighten their hair using a congolene relaxer. Even though the conk did not copy white men's hairstyles and just copied the straightening element of their hair (Mercer, 2000), leaders such as Malcolm X still saw the conk as a step toward self-degradation (Mercer,

2000). In the 1950s, hair was becoming more politicized, with the afro emerging as a symbol of Black power and pride.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the Black Power Movement encouraged African-American men and women to leave straight hairstyles for large afros. Straight hair began to have a negative connotation in the Black community. This time period is when Black people embraced the term "nappy," even though the word historically is a derogatory term (Banks, 2000). Nappy means that you have kinky or curly hair with a frizzy texture. Some women who could not achieve a big afro style went to salons to use chemical processes to achieve that look (Bell, 2007). Perms can be fine-tuned to make straight or wavy hair curly and vice versa. These perms usually last around three to six months before the hair would revert its original state. As one example, in 1990, Julia Roberts amazed fans with her curly hair perm in the film *Pretty Woman* (US Sun, 2021).

The 1960s and 1970s marked the era of the Black is Beautiful movement. Many Black people, celebrities included, were embracing their natural hair. This trend was popularized by entertainers such as singer/songwriter James Brown; comedian, actor, dancer, singer Sammy Davis Jr.; and actress Cicely Tyson, who all wore natural styles during this timeframe. In addition to afros and braids, natural hairstyles also included dreadlocks. Dreadlocks embrace Black hair in its natural state because Black hair is the texture most easily molded into a loc formation (Mercer, 2000).

During the period of the 1960s and 1970s, if a person wore their natural hair, they were considered authentic in their Blackness. Unnatural hair was permed and straightened. If a person wore those styles, some people would consider them inauthentic in their Blackness (Thompson, 2009), in terms of their embrace of Black identity. In 1981, the American Health and Beauty

Aids Institute (AHBAI) was founded to connect the African American community with quality hair products produced by African American companies (Ellington, 2023).

In 1972, the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) claimed White parents needed to be taught hairstyling techniques that may come more readily to Black parents as one of the many reasons to prohibit transracial adoption (Bell, 2007). The NABSW thought it was better for Black kids to be in foster care or institutions than live permanently with White families that did not understand their hair. They thought that if you did not understand Black hair, then you could not understand Black culture. They were concerned that parents who did not understand the texture or historical and cultural significance of Black hair could further harm a child.

In the early 20th century, products were advertised to lighten the color of Black hair and change the texture of Black hair to go from curly to straight. These advertisements would say things like, "If not for themselves, but for their community" (Rookes, 1996). Black entrepreneurs would sell hair products specifically to Black women to help them assimilate into White culture. A closer approximation to White culture was thought to correlate to greater economic and social status in the United States.

Today, Black hair still represents a contested space of identity and representation. For example, Douglas et al. (2020) reported that in 2003, approximately 80% of African-American women treated their hair with a chemical relaxer to straighten it. Unfortunately, some people still refer to so-called good hair as the hair on a Black person's head that looks European, meaning straight, not too curly, not that kinky (Mercer, 2000). In 2004, the Black-Owned Beauty Supply Association continued to strengthen the presence and identity of African-American hair care companies (Ellington, 2023). This was important because Black people continued to face hair

discrimination. For example, in 2007, a Black woman was fired from her job in a West Virginia prison because her braids were deemed inappropriate (Thompson, 2009). In 2019, California passed the Crown Act prohibiting employers from discriminating against different hairstyles and hair textures (Jaima, 2023). This law was one of the first laws that protected Black hair from discrimination. The Crown Act stands for Create a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair.

As Black people's hairstyles have changed throughout history, so has their representation in media. For decades, Black people struggled to be appropriately represented in the media, with their hair being a significant factor. There were still instances of discrimination and prejudice towards Black hair in the media. In recent years, however, there has been a push for more representation and inclusivity in the media, with more Black people being shown with natural hair and a wider range of hairstyles. This has been a significant step forward for Black people regarding representation and acceptance in society.

### **Representation in the media**

According to Hall et al, (2003), "Representation is the ability to describe or imagine" (p.18). Additionally, "Representation is important because culture is always formed through meaning and language." In this case, language is a symbolic form or a form of representation. In this view, representation is a secondary importance process that enters the field only after things have been fully formed and their meaning constituted (Hall, 1997, p. 15).

Hall added, "Representation can be divided into three forms: (1) reflective representation, (2) intentional representation, and (3) constructionist representation... Reflective representation is language or symbols that represent something of value or meaning. Intentional representation is how language or symbols represent the personal purpose of the speaker.

Constructionist representation is how meaning is reconstructed or through language" (Hall, 1997, p.15).

Often, people think of representation when they are unsure of where they belong (Hoffman & Peeren, 2010). Some people only think about representation when they do not see anyone representing them (Hoffman & Peeren, 2010). In the media, representation happens when the repetition of messages reinforces beliefs and makes them appear natural (Helsby, 2019). Media is one of the major sources of information, and interaction with media content plays an important role in ethnic/religious identity (Ittefaq et al., 2023). Without adequate representation in the media, the opportunity for historically underrepresented groups to create and share images and narratives that help shape the awareness of their identity and existence is diminished (Mills, 2019). Therefore, it is instructive to explore how a Black woman and her hair are depicted in the film *Nappily Ever After*.

Greater representation and acceptance of Black hair in the media has also increased hair representation in other areas. For example, more and more Black people wear their natural hair in professional settings. In doing so, they challenge the Eurocentric beauty standards that have long dominated workplaces. More importantly, they demonstrate that there is nothing unprofessional about Black hair in its natural state. The increased representation and acceptance of Black hair in the media has contributed to a larger movement towards hair representation.

### **Hair Representation**

Black women have long been underrepresented in the media (Goldman, 2014). This battle has been longer for Black women with natural, kinky, coarse hair. Both Black and non-Black media companies fall victim to colorism and texturism (Elliot, 2023). Colorism is the preferable treatment of light-skinned people of color, which extends from the racism of slavery

and which contributes to texturism. Texturism is the preference for looser textured hair and sometimes results in discrimination against kinkier, coarse hair within the same race (Ellington, 2023). Positive media representations of African Americans often depict people with lighter skin tones and straight hair because the mass media privileges a mainstream White aesthetic (Ellington, 2023). Some scholars argue that even today, Hollywood still indicates that a Black woman must possess European features to be seen as desirable or valuable (Ellington, 2023). Black women have long fought for more diverse media representations of Blackness and for their own space in the public eye and on their terms (Goldman, 2014).

One place where Black women saw a diversity of Black hairstyles and textures in the media was the cable channel Black Entertainment Television (BET). While other networks also showed Black women's hair, BET appeared to depict more variety in Black women's hair types. In 1980, Robert Johnson founded BET, which originally aired on the network Nickelodeon for two hours (Cheers, 2018). BET would air music videos and reruns of 1970s Black sitcoms. Three years later, BET became the first Black television company and got its own network (Cheers, 2018). In 2005, Debra Lee, a Black woman, became the CEO of BET (Cheers, 2018). Under her leadership, BET thrived. It gave Black girls and women a place to see themselves. BET's shows featured Black women with different hairstyles.

Ava DuVanery is a Black woman and American filmmaker. She has won many awards from organizations such as BET and NAACP. DuVanery's documentary, *My Mic Sounds Nice*, became BET's first original film about Black female hip-hop artists (Goldman, 2014). This documentary was a significant milestone for the representation of Black women (Goldman, 2014). Each Black female artist had their hair in their own style, showing the versatility of Black women and their hair, and showing both Black women and their hair in a positive light.

The 2018 Netflix film *Nappily Ever After* is an example of the growing trend towards more diverse and inclusive representation in the media. The film's portrayal of Black hair and its importance resonated with many viewers, while its message of self-love and acceptance was empowering. The increased representation and acceptance of Black hair in the media contributes to more diverse and inclusive storytelling.

### **Nappily Ever After**

The tale of *Nappily Ever After* is about a woman named Violet Jones. At the start of the film, she has the perfect job, the perfect man, the perfect life, and, most importantly, the perfect hair. However, her "perfection" does not last too long. Due to a styling mishap, she loses all her hair, later loses her boyfriend, begins to have problems at her job, and begins to question her identity. She embarks on a journey, using her hair to reclaim her life and identity.

The film is divided into five stages, which correspond to Violet's evolution in the movie. The first stage is Straighten (Al-Mansour, 2018). At this stage, her life appears to be perfect, and so does her straight hair. Violet is in a relationship with her doctor boyfriend, and she also has a high-ranking position in an advertising company. She keeps her hair long and straight, consistent with Eurocentric beauty and professional standards. Her image is considered graceful, poised, professional, and perfect by those standards.

Weave is the second stage (Al-Mansour, 2018). In Weave, she tries to stay calm when everything is falling apart. Within the context of hairstyles, weave refers to the practice of adding human or artificial hair to an individual's natural hair to enhance the overall volume and appearance. Adding weave to a person's hair can help make their hair more versatile when styling as well as protect it from the harshness of daily styling routines such as blow dryers and curling irons. Violet's weave looks almost like her natural hair. Violet's weave may give the

impression of being natural, but it also serves as a metaphor for her flawless-looking yet artificial life. In *Weave*, we see the cracks in her flawless persona as her life begins to spiral downward following a bad breakup with her boyfriend, who she thought was going to marry her.

Blonde is the third stage (Al-Mansour, 2018). She is trying to change herself - her hair and her personality - to be more free and less uptight. Violet had never dyed or colored her hair before. Going blonde was her way of showing she was fun and free. She wanted to show that she was not uptight all the time and could go with the flow.

Bald is the fourth stage (Al-Mansour, 2018). She is exhausted with her relationship with her hair and cuts it all off. After a bad night, she tries combing her hair, but the comb will not go through. She is at a breaking point with her hair and shaves it off. At that moment, she laughs, smiles, and cries all at the same time.

New Growth is the fifth and final stage (Al-Mansour, 2018). She truly learns to love and accept herself and her hair at this stage. Violet left her job at the advertising company to follow her own career dreams. In the process, she attracts a new suitor, and her ex-boyfriend also returns, infatuated by her new attitude. However, in the end, making this a "new school" fairytale, Violet does not end up with any romantic partners. She ends up allowing herself to be happy with her hair, herself and her new life as she has remade it.

The movie *Nappily Ever After* (2018) provides a rich context to explore the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) and its relevance to understanding of identity formation and management. The film portrays how Violet's hairstyles represent her evolving identity and how her changing identity is a product of her interaction with societal norms and her relationships with others. By examining the different layers of identity through the lens of CTI, we can better understand how individuals construct and manage their identities and how they are

shaped by communication and societal norms. In the thesis, I explore CTI's four interdependent levels of identity, including personal, enacted, relational, and communal, to analyze how Violet's identity evolves throughout the film.

### **Communication Theory of Identity (CTI)**

There are many ways to view cultural identity. According to Hall (1989), "The first sees it as a shared cultural essence, a true self that exists within the superficial or imposed identities that people with a shared history and ancestry have in common" (p.68). "The second perspective sees cultural identity as a process of becoming rather than a fixed state of being" (Hall, 1989, p.70). Dervin (2012) advised, "Cultural identity is complex, combining personal, sexual, national, social, and ethnic identities into one" (p. 38) and added, "it is rooted in culture, which is often seen as unchanging and representative of all its members but is actually an object of power that gives some people the right to define what is considered true and important" (Dervin, 2012, p.40).

Michael Hecht and colleagues developed CTI in the 1980s. The theory emerged from considering identity as a central element of human existence to identity as a social phenomenon (Hayes & Watson, 2023). From social identity theory, CTI draws upon the notion that identity is based on social categorization and shared group membership (Choi & Hecht, 2012). Societal norms form social identities based on social categories. Identity theory is the foundation for CTI. CTI has ten common axiomatic propositions that further define identity, and they are:

1. Identities have individual, social, and communal properties.
2. Identities are both enduring and changing.
3. Identities are affective, cognitive, behavioral, and spiritual.
4. Identities have both content and relationship levels of interpretation.

5. Identities involve both subjective and ascribed meanings.
6. Identities are codes expressed in conversations and define community membership.
7. Identities have semantic properties expressed in core symbols, meanings, and labels.
8. Identities prescribe modes of appropriate and effective communication.
9. Identities are a source of expectations and motivations.
10. Identities are emergent

(Hecht et al, 2005, p.139).

This perspective views identity formation and management as an ongoing communication process with the self and others rather than a simple product of communication or a basis for producing communication (Hecht et al., 2005).

CTI is a framework that examines different layers of individual identity through communication that frames and constructs those identities (Hayes & Waston, 2023). There are four interdependent levels in CTI. Those layers are personal, enacted, relational, and communal. These four layers of identity do not exist separately. The layers are interconnected with each other. However, for analytical purposes, they are often defined and understood separately.

The first layer is personal identity. The personal identity layer frame is how individuals view themselves (Hayes & Watson, 2023). Enacted identity, the second layer, refers to how individuals express their identity to themselves and others (Phillips et al., 2018). The relational identity layer is third. It involves identities manifesting through 1) internalizing identities ascribed by others, 2) defining the self through relationships, 3) the relationship between identities, and 4) the relationship with another (Hecht & et tu, 2005). In the fourth and final layer, communal identity is how different groups or a collective society define themselves (Hayes &

Watson, 2023). Media depictions are important for CTI layers because they can impact how we view ourselves, others, our relationships, in groups, out-groups, and society.

I chose CTI as the focus for my thesis because by using CTI's four interdependent layers of identity, we can explore Violet's evolving identity throughout the film and how it is shaped by communication and societal norms. The personal identity layer frames how Violet views herself, while the enacted identity layer focuses on how she expresses her identity to others. The relational identity layer examines how Violet's identity is shaped by her relationships with others, and the communal identity layer explores how societal norms and expectations affect her identity. The film provides insight into how identity is constructed and managed and how communication plays a crucial role in this process.

After this brief discussion of the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) and its significance in comprehending the development and handling of identity, it is crucial to outline CTI as the methodological approach employed for examining Violet's identity transition in the film *Nappily Ever After*. This next section offers a comprehensive understanding of how I apply CTI to analyze *Nappily Ever After* and the evolution of the main character, Violet's, identity.

### **Ch.3 Method**

Methodologically, my thesis employs the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) as a theoretical framework to analyze the movie *Nappily Ever After* (2018). *Nappily Ever After* was chosen because the film focuses on a Black female character, Violet, and her relationship with her hair. In this movie, her hair is constantly changing, and the movie depicts how the main character's hairstyle affects each identity layer from CTI. I will use the CTI personal, enacted, relational, and communal layers to show how Violet's identity changes and evolves throughout the film. The movie is broken down into five parts. The first part of the movie is Straightened.

Weaves is the second part of the movie. Blonde is the third part of the movie. Bald is the fourth part of the movie. The last part of the movie is New Growth. To conduct my CTI analysis, I will use descriptions of the scenes and quotations from characters in the film to illuminate each of the four CTI layers: personal, enacted, relational, and communal.

The first part of the film is called Straightened (Al-Mansour, 2018). I analyze how Violet felt confident with her straight hair. The film shows how she felt like her life was perfect, yet I will show the subtle clues of how her hair controls her self-perception and her life. She constantly works to make her hair perfect, because she believes if her hair is perfect her life will be perfect. This causes her to feel trapped and not be able to feel free. For example, she constantly checks the weather for rain, wakes up early to straighten her hair, and even pays a lot of money to get it straightened at a salon. In this stage, I will analyze how she perceives her identity and relationships with her mom, boyfriend, and friends when she has straight hair. I will analyze how the movie depicts how society treats those with straight hair in various settings, including work and public spaces. My analysis of this stage will address each of the four CTI layers, including personal, enacted, relational, and communal.

Weave is the second part. I will show how getting the weave, as well as the reason why she had to get a weave in the first place (because her hair fell out), affected Violet's identity (Al-Mansour, 2018). Ever since she was a little girl, she had long hair that was usually straight. Losing her hair affected her relationship with her friends and mother, her romantic relationships, her career, confidence, and happiness. The film portrays how hair loss affected her. She lost confidence in herself because of her hair. Violet's life takes an unexpected turn as she loses control over the things that once seemed perfect, including her relationship with her boyfriend. As a result, Violet starts to feel more insecure and begins to question her identity, leaving her

struggling to rediscover who she truly is. My analysis of this stage will address each of the four CTI layers, including personal, enacted, relational, and communal.

In the Blonde stage of the film, *Nappily Ever After* switches focus from the texture of Violet's hair to the color of her hair (Al-Mansour, 2018). She changes her hair color from brown to blonde, hoping that it would change her personality. Her blonde hair was a way for her to free herself from her past disappointments. In this stage, I will look closely at how her identity changes. I will also examine the guys she attracts with blonde hair, as well as the ways that her interactions with her friends change. Using CTI, I will analyze how her identity changed and how that changed her relationships with others. Thus, my analysis of this stage will address each of the four CTI layers, including personal, enacted, relational, and communal.

In the Bald stage, she shaves off her hair (Al-Mansour, 2018). She is tired of her hair and the emotions it causes. I will analyze why she cut off all of her hair. After losing her self-assurance, she makes an effort to regain her self-love. I observe her mixed emotions of distress and liberation as she no longer constantly worries about her hair. This part will focus heavily on the relationship she has with herself. My analysis of this stage will address each of the four CTI layers, including personal, enacted, relational, and communal.

The New Growth stage is all about embracing self-acceptance (Al-Mansour, 2018). The new hair growth represents a new era for her. She accepted her hair and her identity. She no longer lets her hair have complete control over her identity. Her hair still affects her identity, but this time in a different way. She loves her natural hair. It gives her confidence and makes her feel good in her skin. My analysis of this stage will address each of the four CTI layers including personal, enacted, relational, and communal.

To analyze the film *Nappily Ever After*, I firstly watched the entire movie. Then I watch each scene twice to describe that particular scene in the film. After initially describing the scene by taking notes, I would watch the scene once again for each layer of CTI. In total I watched each scene minimum of six times to ten times. I chose certain quotes because they felt best described the main character's identity at the time. I chose particular scenes to analyze to show the progression of the character with the changing of her hairstyle. I took notes throughout the film and wrote down multiple quotes. While writing the analysis, I determined which quotes best fit each CTI layer.

### **Research Reflexivity**

I, Tasia Travis, identify as an Afro-Latina. The African American side of my family raised me. Being the only Latina in my family, I saw that my hair differed from everyone else's. My grandmother always told me never to cut my hair because I had good curls. I would consider my curls as 4B curls, defined as hair with looser coils. I watched my other family member with 4C hair constantly having to get permed and being told that their curls were too nappy to handle. I constantly put pressure on my curls to be perfect, and it causes me to let my hair control my life. The first time I cut my hair was during my senior year of college while pursuing my undergraduate degree. After that, I constantly changed my hair, trying to accept it. Seeing other Black women struggle with their hair and identity encouraged me to bring awareness to this topic.

## Ch.4 Analysis of Nappily Ever After

### Stage 1: Straightened

#### *Summary*

At the beginning of the movie, we meet Violet. She is a kid at a pool, watching all the other kids having fun in the water. She is standing at the pool's edge because she cannot get in. Her mother has washed, conditioned, and hot combed her hair so she cannot get it wet. Her hair will return to its natural, kinky state if it gets wet. Appearance matters greatly to Violet's mother, who always makes Violet's appearance perfect. A kid teases Violet to enter the pool, and Violet jumps in. Her hair became frizzy and curly. The kids say, "What the hell happened to your hair?" (Al-Mansour, 2018, 03:43). All the kids laugh at her, and her mother calls Violet out of the pool.

In Straightened, Violet's life seems to be a picture-perfect dream. She wakes up early to look perfect before her boyfriend wakes up. She does this every morning by straightening and brushing out her hair. Violet's boyfriend, Clint, is a successful doctor whom she has been dating for two years. He planned a surprise birthday party for Violet that evening. Violet, who found out about the party, thinks he will propose to her at the party that evening. Her mother comes over to flat iron her already straight hair to ensure it is perfect for Violet's big evening. Then, we see Violet in her work life. She is a top executive at an advertising agency. As Violet enters the office, everyone looks at her beauty and confidence.

In the next scene, we see how Violet interacts with her friends. They are outside talking and sipping drinks. Instead of enjoying this moment, Violet is mainly focused on the weather. She is constantly checking to see whether or not there is a rain cloud or a chance of rain. When leaving her friends, she gets sprayed with a water hose by some kids. This is when her perfect life begins to unravel. She calls her mom frantically to try and come over to fix her hair, but her

mother is unavailable. Violet's boyfriend has never seen her curly hair because her mom taught her that her hair needs to be straight to get the dream guy. A friend of Violet's offer to help her fix her hair crisis. The friend says, "I'm going to call my hairstylist and see if she can fit you in" (Al-Mansour, 2018, 12:01). Violet even offers a lady \$200 to take her hair appointment to fix her hair before her surprise birthday party that night.

After the friend calls her hairstylist, we see Violet inside the salon. Violet is handing a lady cash and then takes her chair. Violet catches Zoey, a young girl, staring at her. Zoey, a child with her hair natural and free, starts talking to Violet. Zoey's hair is short, with an Afro hairstyle. Violet confronts Zoey by telling her that staring is rude. Zoey said, "Pay me five dollars, and I'll stop" (Al-Mansour, 2018, 13:07). Then the hairstylist came over and told Zoey to stop bothering her client. Violet tells the hairstylist that Zoey's hair looks crazy, and then Zoey is instructed to get the conditioner. When Violet's conditioner is rinsed, her hair starts falling in chunks. We find out Zoey handed the hairstylist a relaxer instead of a conditioner. The owner of the hair salon, Zoey's father, tried to apologize to Violet. Then Violet says, "Is that your daughter? With that mop on her head?" (Al-Mansour, 2018, 15:08). Violet believes that Zoey intentionally gave the hairstylist a relaxer instead of a conditioner to ruin her hair. She insults Zoey for ruining her hair and her father for being a hair salon owner and not appropriately styling Zoey's hair. Violet was taught that if your hair is in an afro style, it is not properly done. Then they start to argue, and the hair salon owner has to figure out how to fix Zoey's mistake. The way Zoey's father fixed the mistake was with weave.

### *CTI Analysis*

The personal layer of CTI is defined as how individuals view themselves (Hayes & Watson, 2023). On the personal layer of CTI, Violet views herself as perfect with straight hair.

She believes that her appearance is why everything is going right with her life. She will not let anyone or anything mess with her hair. She is constantly paranoid about the weather and her family, friends, and significant other seeing her curly hair. When having lunch with her girls, she keeps looking at the sky. Violet stops herself mid-sentence to ask, "Are you sure that is not a rain cloud?" (Al-Mansour, 2018, 11:04). Her appearance consumes her daily life. In a sex scene, Violet does not allow her boyfriend to touch her hair while they are having sexual intercourse. She allows her hair to become who she is. Her mother raised her to make her identity around her hair being straight. Violet's flashbacks show how she must have her hair washed, conditioned, and hot combed once a week. Her hair had to be perfectly straight. She says, "Only then was I perfect" (Al-Mansour, 2018, 02:57). Her mother conditions her to believe that with perfect hair, she can get a perfect life, a perfect guy, and a perfect job. Violet has carried that belief and kept her hair straight ever since. She believes Clint will not marry her if her hair is not straight. She feels that people only love her when her hair is straight. Therefore, Violet keeps her hair straight to keep her life perfect. This shows how much control Violet's hair has over her confidence, life, and mind.

The enacted layer of CTI refers to how individuals express their identity to themselves and others (Phillips et al., 2018). In the enacted layer, Violet expresses herself to others as perfect. Her appearance is beautiful and adheres to the Eurocentric beauty standard. She explains that she will soon be married to a doctor. She tells her friends, "The doctor is about to be in" (Al-Mansour, 2018, 11:18). Marrying a doctor shows off her status to her family and friends, showing her as financially well off. At the hair salon, Violet also says, "In a few hours, my man will be proposing to me" (Al-Mansour, 2018, 15:17). This is another time that Violet shows and tells everyone how well off she is. She also shows off how good she is at her advertising agency

because she sells the Eurocentric beauty standards to women. She tells her friend how she knows what women want. Women want to feel beautiful, and she sells them beauty in her advertisements. She expresses herself as perfect and elegant to everyone around her, from friends, significant others, co-workers, strangers, and more.

The relational identity layer involves identities manifesting through 1) internalizing identities ascribed by others, 2) defining the self through relationships, 3) the relationship between identities, and 4) the relationship with another (Hecht et al., 2005). On the relational layer, Violet's identity is defined by what she has and how she looks but not by who she is. Others describe Violet as not having fun or letting loose. Violet's boyfriend tells her she is perfect. Violet sees herself through her relationship with her mother and how successful her boyfriend is. Her boyfriend is a successful doctor, and that makes Violet feel even more successful. If Violet's appearance pleases her mother, then her appearance is perfect for herself and the world. Violet cares about what people think about her looks because of the pressure her mother put on her as a child. In Violet's flashbacks, she says, "I was a reflection of her as a mother" (Al-Mansour, 2018, 02:11). Violet's mother projected her insecurities and beauty standards onto her daughter. She made Violet keep her hair straight and kept her appearance in line with Eurocentric beauty standards

Communal identity is how different groups or a collective society define themselves (Hayes & Watson, 2023). The Eurocentric beauty standard includes long, straight hair, which can be pushed onto people by society. Curly hair is not seen as professional or as beautiful as straight hair. Appearance matters in how people treat you, and Violet believes society treats her well because of her appearance. Violet's mother always makes Violet appeal to the Eurocentric beauty standards. In Violet's flashback, she says, "It was an ever-present source of anxiety to prove that I

was just as well-groomed as any White child" (Al-Mansour, 2018, 02:16). Violet's mother made her feel that as a child, she had to be as beautiful as any White child. Therefore, Violet also tries to appeal to the Eurocentric beauty standards to please society.

This part of the movie shows Violet's perfect life crumble when her hair gets wet. Once it became wet, Violet knew the kinks would return. It was not just the kinks in her hair that Violet feared. It was also "the kinks" in her life that would come if her hair was not perfectly straight that she feared. This made her scramble to find someone to re-straighten her hair. But that plan went awry at the salon when the stylist accidentally put relaxer in Violet's hair instead of conditioner because Zoey gave the stylist the wrong hair product. Chunks of Violet's hair began to fall at the salon. Her surprise birthday party was only in a few hours and she was supposed to be getting engaged. Her hair was a mess, and the hair salon owner had only a few hours to figure out how to fix it. There is only one solution to this problem.

## **Stage 2: Weave**

### *Summary*

When Weave begins, we see Violet's hair is perfectly straight again. There are no curls, bald spots, or shedding hair. You could not tell that her hair was coming out before. She is at her birthday party, and her hair looks perfect. No one could tell that she was wearing a weave. Then we see one of Violet's mother's friends start to speak to Violet about how her mother's hair was in an afro. She describes the afro as bad and tells Violet how people would make fun of Violet's mom. Clint then goes to make a toast and describes Violet as perfect. He tells Violet she makes him think about family. Then he pulls out what appears to be an engagement ring box; instead of a ring, the box contains a tag. Then the waiter brings out another big box, and it is a dog. Instead of proposing, Clint got Violet, a dog.

After getting the dog, Violet goes to the bathroom and gets really upset. Her friends and mom comfort her. They go to comfort Violet because they know she was expecting to get a marriage proposal. She was not met with a ring but instead with a puppy she never asked for. She asks, "What is wrong with me?" (Al-Mansour, 2018, 18:18). Violet fixes herself up because of her mother's wishes. She takes the frown off her face and goes back to the party. She pretends not to be upset for the rest of the party. When she goes home with Clint, Clint notices that she is displeased. He asks, "You do not like the dog?" Violet tells him she was expecting a ring and to be proposed to. He is confused about why she was expecting a ring. After dating her for two years, Clint tells Violet he knows nothing about her. He says the only thing he knows is that she is perfect. Clint said, "24/7 perfection is like being on a two-year first date" (Al-Mansour, 2018, 20:44). Violet takes this to mean that Clint is saying that he does not want to marry her because he does not know her well enough. Violet is overcome with sadness because she thinks they are perfect for each other and are close to marriage. Because they have been dating for two years, Violet believes the next step is marriage. However, hearing Clint say he felt as though they never left the first date stage made Violet believe that he was never going to marry her. Then, she asked Clint to leave. In this moment, we see Violet's vulnerability. Yet, even in this vulnerable moment, with tears in her eyes, she still brushed her hair and ensured her weave looked perfect.

In the next scene, when Violet goes to work at the advertising agency, her outfit is disheveled. Some of the buttons on her shirt are not buttoned up. Her hair is still perfect in this scene. If you were just looking at Violet's hair, you would not be able to tell anything was wrong. It shows that even in her worst moments, she is conditioned to make her hair look as perfect as possible. Then, she does her pitch for the client. She messes up. Her pitch includes pictures of a woman who uses red lipstick to land the dream guy. Violet is so out of sorts that she almost falls

and knocks over one of her photo pitches. The client says the woman in the advertisement photo is pretty but not perfect without the lipstick. Violet then gets defensive. She was irritated because the client said the lady would not be perfect until she put on lipstick. Perfect is a trigger word for Violet because that is what her ex-boyfriend called her. When being defensive, she talks about how it is unfair to call women perfect. She then starts arguing with the client, coworkers, and boss. Her boss tells her that he loves the pitch but not her. She is then told to take some days off and clear her mind. Violet goes shopping to help clear her mind, where she sees Zoey – the young girl from the hair salon – shoplifting.

Zoey was in the store and did not see Violet until Violet instructed Zoey to return the dress she was attempting to steal and leave. Zoey then returned the dress, and Violet made her leave the store. Violet did not know that Zoey had other stolen items in her bag. When they leave the store, Zoey sets off the alarm, and the security guard searches Violet and Zoey. The security guards called Zoey's father to come and get her. Will shows up and yells at Zoey. Then, Violet starts to argue with Zoey's father. They argue about the way he is parenting Zoey. Violet believes that Zoey's father has no clue what is happening with her. She feels that Zoey needs better discipline. Violet sees a couple walking by and starts reminiscing about her past relationship with Clint.

### *CTI Analysis*

The personal layer of CTI is defined as how individuals view themselves (Hayes & Watson, 2023). On a personal level, Violet no longer sees perfection as a good thing anymore. She now sees it as unfair and does not want to see herself as perfect. She wants to be more than just that. Clint said, "24/7 perfection is like being on a two-year first date" (Al-Mansour, 2018, 20:44). You can see that Violet loses her confidence because of her ex-boyfriend's words. She

believed that her now ex-boyfriend Clint would love and marry her if she were perfect. Instead, it had the opposite effect, causing Violet to no longer know what to believe. Those words cause Violet to question her identity. Violet struggles to define herself beyond her physical beauty, leaving her uncertain about her true identity and sense of self.

The enacted layer of CTI refers to how individuals express their identity to themselves and others (Phillips et al., 2018). On the enacted level, Violet still tries to show her identity as perfect, as if nothing is wrong. However, Violet's assistant asks her, "Are you okay?" (Al-Mansour, 2018, 23:47). Since Violet came to work with her top not being fully buttoned, Violet's nonverbal communication shows something is wrong. Violet tells everyone she is fine, but her behavior and appearance say otherwise. Violet even tells herself she is okay. She tries to convince herself and the outside world that everything is good. She does not want to question the identity her mother built for her, and that she took on without a second thought.

The relational identity layer involves identities manifesting through 1) internalizing identities ascribed by others, 2) defining the self through relationships, 3) the relationship between identities, and 4) the relationship with another (Hecht et tu., 2005). On the relational layer, Violet's identity has been fixed by her mother since she was young. Look beautiful, get the prince, and live happily after that. Her mother defined her as perfect, and Violet described herself as perfect. Violet knew that her success was also a reflection of her mother. Violet's mother said at the dinner party, "Now they will be calling me the mother-in-law of a doctor" (Al-Mansour, 2018, 16:15). Violet's mother showed that Violet's success is her own success. Violet defines herself through her relationship with Clint. Marrying him would be the ultimate success for her. When he did not propose, it was her ultimate failure. She immediately blames herself. She wondered why she was not good enough for him even though she had only shown him

perfection. Now that her relationship is over, Violet does not want her identity to go from perfection to failure. In this moment, Violet is confused on her identity.

Communal identity is how different groups or a collective society define themselves (Hayes & Watson, 2023). In our society, women are expected to be married after dating a man for a certain amount of time. Also, they are expected to have a husband and children by a certain age. Violet is feeling those expectations placed on her by society and her mother. Since Violet broke up with Clint, she blamed herself for the relationship not going well. In society, women are often blamed when it comes to relationships not working out. Violet first blamed herself for not seeing before that he did not want to marry her. While all this is happening, society still expects Violet to go to work and be professional. Society does not see the break up as an excuse to miss work. Therefore, Violet does not see that either. Violet's identity has always been to please society and her mother.

In this stage, we witness Violet fall apart. In her personal life, she lost the man she loved. In her career, she messed up her pitch and was asked to take some days off from work. When Violet's hair was all hers and straight, everything appeared perfect. While her weave looks almost as good as her own hair when it is straightened, it is not. We see that everything is not ideal with Violet. In the next section, we find out how she handles these issues.

### **Stage 3: Blonde**

#### *Summary*

The third stage is Blonde. Violet's hair is Blonde in the middle and bottom. Her root hair color is dark brown. Her hair is now shorter and shoulder length. Violet says that the hair is called "Fuck you hair" (Al-Mansour, 2018, 28:43). She is going out with her girls to forget about her ex-boyfriend. When they enter the club, Violet falls in front of a crowd. A man picks her up

and persuades her to stay at the club with him. They drink at the bar, and then the scene moves to his place. His house is luxurious and beautiful, and Violet is impressed by it. The man says that her hair told him about her personality. They start making out. He calls her wild, and she pushes him onto the kitchen table. She is initially scared, but he reassures her that he likes it. She then rips apart his shirt, and his buttons come undone. Then she pours honey onto his bare chest. She rubs the honey across his bare chest. Her hand slipped while rubbing the honey across his chest, and her head bumped him. He starts bleeding from the head bump. Violet starts crying and leaves.

She gets an Uber to go home. In the Uber, she starts to vent to the Uber driver. The Uber driver gives her advice. He tells her that she acted unreasonably. After listening to the Uber driver, she asked him to take her to the hospital where her ex works. She sees her ex-boyfriend flirting with another woman when she goes to the hospital. The woman is also Black with long, brown, straight hair. Violet stares at them, frozen because she was not expecting to see him with another woman. Clint approaches her, confused, and asks why she is there. Violet tries to leave and tells him to forget about it. He stops her and then says, "What did you do to your hair?" (Al-Mansour, 2018, 34:14). Violet responds that this is Fuck you hair and tells him to go back to the woman he is flirting with. He tries to justify his flirting with her. Violet cuts him off and accuses him of sleeping with her. Violet expressed how feels that she meant very little to Clint. Clint responds that she was the one who kicked him out. Violet then leaves and goes home. She has a bottle of wine while putting Clint's stuff in a box. She is drinking wine and packing at the same time.

Violet puts the wine bottle down and removes her jewelry in the mirror. When she looks up, she stares at herself. Her hair is all over the place. It is not straight anymore. It is in a frizzy,

afro-like state. When Violet sees her hair, she tries to go through it with a small tooth comb. The comb will not go through her hair. She throws the comb down. Then she stares at herself again. Her tears are starting to form in her eyes. She keeps touching her hair. Then she looks at the razor and turns it on. She pulls her hair back and starts cutting off her hair. She is smiling and crying at the same time. Violet watches herself cut off her hair. With every cut, she gets more confident with the razor. She starts cutting more and faster. She is whimpering by the end of the cut. When she is finished cutting, she looks at herself and smiles in the mirror. In one night, Violet's whole world turns upside down.

### *CTI Analysis*

On the personal level, Violet is trying to change the identity that she grew up with. She is trying to change her identity to be a fun and spontaneous woman. Her whole life, Violet viewed herself as someone who constantly had to be perfect. One of the main factors in her perfection was her hair. That is why she started changing her hair while trying to change her identity. Violet looks in the mirror and says, "This is me. This is called Fuck you hair" (Al-Mansour, 2018, 28:44). Her changing her hair to blonde symbolizes to herself that she could be wild and fun. Violet never had color in her hair before. Blonde is a bold color that stands out, and that is precisely what Violet wants to do. Currently, she is trying to figure out who she wants to be. In this moment, she wants to be the fun woman who does not care as much. She even convinces herself to go to the club and wear clothing she usually would not wear. Going back to the man's house was Violet's way of convincing herself she could be the wild woman. After hitting his head, she realizes she cannot be the fun, wild woman. In the Uber, she tries to change back to her old identity. Her old identity involves Clint, so she goes to see him. When Clint appears to move on, Violet is once confused about who she wants to be. Lastly, cutting her hair was a sign of

relief. Her hair is directly tied to her identity. When her hair was long, straight, and her natural hair color, she had to be perfect Violet. When her hair is straight, blonde, and medium length, she experimented with being fun, risk-taking Violet. Cutting her hair symbolizes giving herself a fresh start and discovering who she is.

On the enacted layer, Violet is trying to convince her friends that she is now the wild and free girl. She shows them her hair, and they are surprised. Violet's friend says, "I don't really know if it's you" (Al-Mansour, 2018, 28:24). Her hair is not enough to convince her friends, so she insists on going to the club with them and proves that she has changed. She goes to the club with them to try and appear more fun. Then, in the club, she tries to act like a let-go-of-everything type of girl. She portrays to the man that she is wild by pouring honey on him and ripping his shirt off. Violet then portrays her identity differently for Clint. She shows Clint her old identity because she thought she would see him alone. After seeing him with a woman, Violet changes her personality. She portrays herself as a woman who does not care about anything, not to appear hurt. Violet shows different identities to different people because she wants to appear to be over Clint.

On the relational layer, Violet tried moving away from the identity that she had always been given. Her friends are not convinced by the sudden change in who she is. They still support her and help her change clothes to fit her new identity. From her friend's point of view, Violet's identity is that she always does the right thing in every situation. She had never really went all out and changed her hair color before. Her going blonde and shorter was shocking to them. The man at the club tells Violet, "Your hair told me everything that I need to know. You're not afraid of anything. You love to take a chance" (Al-Mansour, 2018, 30:44). For the first time, someone saw Violet as a risk taker and fun. She wanted to keep that identity, so she poured honey on his

chest. Violet defined herself at that moment by her hair and the men's words. Then, when that did not work out, Violet realized she wanted her old identity back, the one her mother gave her. With her old identities come old relationships. She went after him to feel complete that night. When she saw him with someone else, she no longer wanted her old identity back. Violet is now stuck between the identities that she has portrayed.

On the communal layer, some people say that blondes have more fun. Violet wanted to have more fun and convey that through her hair. She went with blonde because it is a color that stands out, and she wanted to embrace the stereotype of blondes having more fun. Clint saw Violet and asked, “What did you do to your hair?” (Al-Mansour, 2018, 34:16). Clint only saw Violet with perfectly straight long, brown hair. Her new hair does not align with the societal standards he always saw her have. The man at the club saw her hair and assumed that she was fun and wild with her hair color. Violet wanted society not to see her as a people pleaser anymore; instead, she wanted to be seen as a risk taker.

In this stage, Violet completes changing her identity. She changes her style, hairstyle, and hair color. She goes out and almost sleeps with a man just met at a club. She then finds out that Clint has already slept with someone else. She feels more broken. She is not comfortable trying to change her identity, and she gets hurt trying to go back to her old identity. In the next section, we see how Violet reacts to having no hair.

#### **Stage 4: Bald**

##### *Summary*

In Bald, Violet wakes up in her bed. She goes to the bathroom and looks at herself. Then, she immediately screams multiple times to the top of her lungs. Before Violet could calm down her emotions, she heard her doorbell ring. When Violet opens the door, her mom walks in,

looking down at her purse. Violet then calls her mother, and she looks up. Her purse slips off her arms when she sees Violet's hair, and she faints. Violet is now screaming again, but this time, she is screaming at her Mom. Violet called her dad to help with her mom. He tells Violet she is okay and should no longer call him for her mother. Violet then expresses how much she needs her father. Her father tells her how beautiful she is. He says her hair being cut off shows off her pretty face. Violet tells how she tried to be everything that Clint wanted and how tired she is. Her father tells her she has been building up to cutting her hair, which she did not do on a whim. He finally makes Violet chuckle and smile just a bit.

When Violet returns to work, she wears a scarf over her head. She is no longer turning heads or getting the attention she used to get when her hair is long and straight. She then goes to the women's restrooms and cries. While crying, she argues with a lady who needs to use the restroom. There is only one women's bathroom on the floor she is on. The lady is telling her she has to use the restroom. Violet refuses to come out of the bathroom and tries to persuade the lady to use the men's room. Violet then tells the woman to leave her alone. The women then start crying, and Violet comes out of the restroom. Violet apologize for her rude behavior earlier. They talk to each other about their struggle. The lady invites Violet to her support program and gives Violet a piece of paper with the address.

In the next scene, we see Violet walking to the support group. A lady is talking about her struggles with cancer. Violet then realizes that the support group is for women with cancer. She tries to sneak out, but the support group leader calls her out. Violet explains that it is a misunderstanding and that she does not have cancer. She explains why she cut her hair to the group and calls the women incredible for overcoming their struggles. She apologized for the

misunderstanding again. The support group leader asks to see Violet's hair. Then she starts to chuckle. She tells Violet she has to own her hair.

After those words, Violet goes to work the next day with no scarf on her hair. She manages to regain some of her confidence regarding her hair. This time, she is turning people's heads. Men look at her, and women admire her beauty and confidence. Violet goes to her boss to ask to move out of beauty accounts into more high-profile accounts. She wants to do the advertisement for Amber Lite. She tells her boss she does not want to deal with beauty advertisements for now. Her boss gives her a chance to do the Amber Lite commercial. They make a deal that if her Amber Lite commercial is not picked, she will return to the old Violet. Her boss says, "We go back to the old Violet. All the way back" (Al-Mansour, 2018, 47:43).

Then, we see her at a bar with her friends. They are all drinking beers. Violet's friends tell her how good she looks with her bald hair. She was at the bar to help get ideas for the Amber Lite beer commercial. Her friend talks about how beer commercials are sexist, and they want to see something different. They leave the bar, and Violet goes home.

The next day, Violet checks her mail and sees a letter from Zoey. She apologizes to Violet in the letter for getting her arrested in the mall. Violet is so moved by the letter that she goes to Zoey's house. Zoey opens the door and wonders if Violet's bald hair is her fault. Violet came to bring Zoey a birthday present. The birthday present was the dress that Zoey tried to steal in the mall. Zoey is delighted with the gift but confused about why Violet got her a birthday gift. Violet then tells Zoey to try on the dress to ensure it fits. Zoey tries it on and shows Violet. Violet complimented Zoey on her appearance, but then Zoey insulted her experience. Violet is confused about where those insults come from. Zoey then tells her that what you said to me before. Violet starts feeling guilty about how she acted before. She tells Zoey, "Zoey, do not ever let someone's

negative opinion of you become your reality" (Al-Mansour, 2018, 50:35). Violet gives Zoey more tips on her confidence and helps with her appearance. Zoey takes off the dress and goes back to regular clothes.

Violet starts braiding Zoey's hair. Violet expresses how she wanted braids but was not allowed to have any. Zoey's dad, Will, then arrives at the home. Violet apologizes for her previous behavior, and Will apologizes for his earlier behavior. Will invites Violet to stay over for dinner. Violet accepts his invitation to stay for dinner. They have a bunch of plants around the house. Violet asks about the plants. Will talks about how he makes his hair products with the plants. He makes them to meet the needs of Black consumers. He mentions that Black people are the biggest consumers of weaves and wigs. He wants to change that narrative because he wants more Black people to wear their natural hair. He talks about telling his daughter she is beautiful, but it is hard when she does not see herself in the media. Violet and Will starts to flirt with each other, and Zoey calls them out. Will plays some music and asks about Violet's music tastes. A song she mentions is Black Mermaid. He wants her to sing the song, but Violet claims she cannot. Violet agrees to say the word to the song Black Mermaid when Zoey and Will look away from each other. While saying the words, she transitions to singing the song when she gets more comfortable. After dinner and Violet singing, Will walks Violet back to his car. Will talks about how society views him because he is a single dad, straight, and a hairdresser. He brings all this up to ask Violet on a date.

In the next scene, we see Violet preparing for her date while Black Mermaid plays in the background. She is wearing her bald hair and smiles in the mirror while putting on her makeup. Then Violet hears her doorbell ring, and her mom is at the door. Violet's mom is distressed because Violet's father is in a magazine as an underwear model. Violet's mom worries about what

people will think about her when they see him in that magazine. Violet's mother realizes she is dressed up and asks about her plans. She smiles because she thinks Clint and Violet are back together. Violet shuts that idea down. Violet's mother says, "I guess you made sure of that" (Al-Mansour, 2018, 58:37). While she says that, she stares at Violet's head. Violet tells her she has to meet her date soon. Violet's mother is disgusted that she is meeting the man, and he is not picking her up. Violet's mom also worries that her daughter has become a lesbian because of her closely cropped hairstyle. Violet expresses how she is a female role model to her date's daughter. Violet's mother is even more shocked that she is dating a man with a child.

Violet then leaves, and we see her walking toward her date. Violet is overdressed for the date because it is at a public garden. Violet then goes to the store nearby and buys a shirt to be more casual. Will takes Violet to a food truck. They both order food, and Will pays for the food. Will then asks what happened to her getting married. Violet tells him that Clint does not want to marry her because she is too perfect. Will said he had not seen her in a beauty shop. He also tells Violet that she probably was not entirely comfortable with him. Violet redirected the conversation and started asking about Zoey's mom's whereabouts. Will tells Violet that Zoey's mom was unprepared for motherhood. Violet then reassures Will that he is doing a good job. He talks about how Zoey misses her mom. They walk and talk throughout the garden. Will brought a hair oil he made for Zoey. He then puts the oil in Violet's hair and massages it in. He tells Violet that it is all natural and that she could eat it. Then he uses the hair dropper in the hair oil bottle and drops a bit in her mouth. Then they kiss each other.

Violet starts going on more frequent dates with Will and coming over to Zoey's house more often. While Violet and Will are bonding, so are Violet and Zoey. Violet seems more happy and carefree.

*CTI Analysis*

In the personal layer, Violet starts with a high level of confusion. Her lack of hair confuses her about who she is and what she wants to be. Violet loses her confidence and tries to blend in the background. Violet is not confident in her hair and, therefore, not confident in herself. She hides at work and covers her head with a scarf because she is ashamed. At this moment, Violet views herself as insecure and unworthy of being seen. Then, after the support group, Violet shifts her attitude towards herself. The support group leader says, “You walk around like that, of course, you are going to get ignored. You got to own it, girl.” (Al-Mansour, 2018, 46:01). She thought she was being ignored because of her hair and deserved to be forgotten. After the encouraging words from the support group, she realizes that she is being ignored because she is trying to make herself invisible to be ignored. She gains more confidence and shows off her bald head. She is starting to shift her identity away from her hair. Not only is she more confident in her beauty, but she gains more confidence at work. Violet tells her boss, “I want Amber Lite” (Al-Mansour, 2018, 46:59).

After gaining confidence, Violet shifts her identity to reconcile her old mistakes. She visits Zoey and apologizes for the harsh words she said about her before. She does not want Zoey to feel less confident in her natural hair like she does. She is opening herself up to learn from her mistakes and making connections. Violet is healing her inner child by telling Zoey what she wishes she had heard as a child. Violet matures into a woman she is comfortable being. She does not fully know who she is, but she is learning.

In the enacted layer, Violet starts expressing herself as unworthy of being seen. She kept her head down and tried to walk faster to her office. She was trying her best not to be seen by anyone. Then, she gains some confidence and expresses herself as someone who does not care

what people see and think about her. At first, she was afraid of people's opinions about her hair. She matured and did not care about people's opinions on her hair. She then starts to gain more confidence in her bald head. She wears it out to the bar, work, and public places. She expresses that even with a bald head, she is still beautiful and graceful. Then Violet shows Zoey her vulnerable side. Violet tells Zoey, "Zoey, don't ever let someone's negative opinion of you become your reality" (Al-Mansour, 2018, 50:34). She changes to someone kind and patient. Violet expresses herself as more raw and authentic to those around her because she does not have to worry about perfection.

In the relational layer, this is Violet's first time not having her identity defined by her relationship, mother, or society. Violet begins to define her own identity, allowing her friends, family, and the world to see her without worrying about their expectations. Ever since Violet was little, she has been described as perfection. Not having that description weighs her down. Her friend asked, "So what it's like? Waking up in the morning and not having to worry about your hair." (Al-Mansour, 2018, 48:07). She says she has so much time now that she does not worry about her hair. She feels relieved because her hair has taken up every part of her day. In addition, Violet is dating a man for who he is and not for what he does. She does not show off her relationship because she does not feel the need to. She is happy being with him but not making him her identity. Violet stops trying to define herself through relationships and learns to identify who she is for herself.

In the communal layer, society sees bald women as less desirable or as sick. The lady in the bathroom invited Violet to her support group because she thought she had cancer. Some people believe that if a woman is bald then she must have cancer. Violet is changing this narrative by being confident in her bald head. She is not trying to hide or feel ashamed about it

anymore. When Violet goes to see Zoey, they discuss societal beauty standards. Will talks about how he wants Zoey to love her natural hair, but he is competing with mass media. Violet says to Will, “I make some of those commercials, and you can’t just put the blame on us. I mean, we’re just reflecting society” (Al-Mansour, 2018, 54:08). Here, she is talking about the ads her company makes and distributes in the mass media. Violet realizes the narrative she grew up with is the narrative she is making in her advertisement.

In this section, Violet is more authentic. She has fun and does not worry about perfection. Being bald allows her to spend more time on herself and not her hair. She is becoming more and more herself every day. She is not entirely confident yet but is working to get there.

### **Stage 5: New growth**

#### *Summary*

At the start of New Growth, Violet's friends discuss her relationship with Will. Violet tells them she is taking it slow with him and is bringing him to her mother's Fourth of July party. Violet's hair is laid down in waves. She is no longer bald and has some new growth. Then Violet's friends discuss how they saw Violet's dad in the magazine. They tease Violet about it, and she begs them to stop.

In the next scene, we see Will and Violet walking to Violet's mother's house. Violet's hair is no longer laid down in waves. She has her hair in short afro curls. He talks about how Violet is worried he will not pass mom test. Violet's mother then answered the door, and Violet introduced Will to her mother. Violet's mother is upset because she is unaware that Violet is bringing a guest to her party. Will brought Violet's mother flowers from his garden. She is unimpressed by the flowers. In a sign of disrespect, Violet's mother introduced Violet to another man named Gerard,

who appears more upscale than the date Violet brought. Gerard talks about how Violet looks different from her photos. He is specifically talking about how her hair is shorter and curlier.

Violet's mother talks about Gerard, who is a lawyer. Gerard says he is focusing more on the Senate now. Will then introduces himself to Gerard. Violet's mother asks Violet to fix Gerard's drink. Will makes a joke about Gerard's hand being broken to intercept. Violet's mother asks Will what his career is. Violet steps in before he can answer and says he is a business owner. Violet's mother asks how they met each other. Violet answers before Will can speak and says they meet professionally. Will then invites Gerard and Violet's mother to come and get their hair done at his salon. Violet's mother disapproves of him owning a hair salon. Will then excuses himself to pick up his daughter. Violet mother insults Will again and says this is the carless date. Will then leaves, and Violet chases after him.

Will expresses that he feels like an embarrassment to Violet. He describes how he thought they had a great relationship. Violet also believed that they have a great relationship. Will talks about how Violet is confused about her identity. He then says he cannot take chances on someone who does not know who they are because he has a daughter. Will then leaves the party. Violet stands at the door with tears in her eyes. Violet then goes home and distracts herself with work. She paces around her house, trying to come up with an idea for the Amber Lite commercial.

In the next scene, Violet is at work. Her hair is laid down again into finger waves. Her assistant told her they were ready for her in the conference room. Her assistant reassures her that her pitch is fantastic. Violet pitches her idea to her boss and coworkers. On the pitch, men are screaming at the basketball game. Women are annoyed and buy the man Amber Lite. While the men are drinking Amber Lite, they are quiet. Both the women and the men enjoy the basketball

game together. Violet ends her pitch with "Amber Lite: It does you right" (Al-Mansour, 2018, 1:11:14). Violet's boss and coworkers applaud her. Then, the boss asked how she saw the women in her commercial. Violet responds that she did not want models. She wants real women for the commercial. Then, the competing team for the Amber Lite commercial makes their pitch.

In their pitch, a cruise ship is sinking. All the lifeboats are full except for one. There are two guys left on the cruise ship. One is a stud, and the other is a nerd. The women with one spot left in their boat are white women with long blonde hair and large breasts, fitting the Eurocentric beauty standard. The women save the nerd because he has an Amber Lite bottle. Once they finish the pitch, the boss starts laughing. Then, the boss, a middle-age white man, picks the competitor's team pitch on the spot instead of Violet's. Violet protests that their pitch has no originality. After that, Violet decides to quit her job. Violet's boss is shocked by this and insists it is only one pitch, suggesting that losing it was not reason enough to quit. Violet says she has been wanting to quit for a while now.

Violet goes home and starts to take down her old pitches. To relieve her stress, she plays music and dances in front of her dog, Lola. Clint then walks into the house, holding a box. He stares at Violet while she dances. Violet then turns around and sees Clint and immediately screams. Clint apologizes and talks about her dancing. Violet asks him what he is doing here. Clint says he came to get the rest of his things, and Lola peed at him. Clint says he needs a shower after being peed on. Violet allows Clint to take a shower. Clint apologizes for making Violet feel bad for being perfect. Clint expresses that he should have never left Violet. While Clint is in the shower, Violet joins in. Before Violet would not let him touch their hair during sexual intercourse; now, she is joining him in the shower and having spontaneous sexual intercourse. She is allowing her hair to get wet in the shower and allowing Clint to touch her hair.

They sleep in the same bed, and the following day, Violet gets up. She almost does her old routine of putting on makeup and fixing her hair before Clint wakes up. She stops herself and instead starts to cook some breakfast. Clint stops her and expresses how much she cares for him. He says it is his turn to begin caring for her, and he resumes cooking the breakfast that Violet started making. Violet talks about all the time she gains now that she does not have to think about her hair. She said it started feeling like a second job. Clint then asked if she plans on growing it back. Violet expresses that she has not decided yet.

On the one hand, Violet expresses how she was dismissed and overlooked because of her hair. On the other hand, it allows her to focus on different parts of herself. Clint asks what happens when he leaves, and Violet says she has no answer.

Clint takes an onion ring, gets down on one knee, and asks Violet if she will marry him. Violet then laughs it off, and Clint then asks her again. Violet says yes. She tells her friends the good news and says the wedding is in three months. Violet's mother is overjoyed when she hears the news. Violet then drives to Zoey's house and braids her hair. She also tells Zoey the news of her getting married soon. Violet, her parents, and Clint all go to a restaurant together to discuss the wedding. At the restaurant, Violet's hair is curly and short.

Then we fast forward to Zoey and Violet hanging out at Violet's house. Violet tells Zoey that her engagement party is tomorrow night. She invites Zoey to the engagement party, and Zoey is overjoyed. Fast forward to the next day, and Violet is steaming her dress. Clint is getting frustrated over his tie. Violet then fixes the tie for Clint, and he says he needs everything to be perfect. Then he asks Violet to straighten her hair for the engagement party. He asks her to do this because Violet will meet his parents for the first time at the engagement party. Clint's request takes Violet aback. Clint says it is for his parents and wants them to like her. He says his request

is a small ask and that he needs everything to be perfect. Violet agrees to straighten her hair. She calls his mom over to do it. Violet's mom comes over. Violet sits in the kitchen on a chair while her mother straightens her hair.

Violet, Clint, and her mom go to the engagement party. Clint introduces Violet to his parents. Zoey is there. She touching food and putting it back on the table if she does not want to eat it, like many little kids do. Violet's mother sees Zoey and asks who she came here with. Violet mother compliments her dress and then insults her hair. Zoey's hair is braided in an afro-frohawk style with a flower on the side. Zoey talks about how her hair looks good. Violet then reassures Zoey that her hair looks good. Violet's mother lectures Violet on inviting Will's daughter to the party. Violet then goes inside the house because her feet hurt. She takes off her heels and breathes. Clint notices that Violet is missing. He asks her mother where she is, and Violet's mother does not know where she is. They look for Violet, and Violet's father joins the search. They find Violet. Clint asks if she is doing alright. Violet expresses that she cannot put her heels back on. She describes how she has to put them back on to be perfect. She feels she can only go back to the party if she is perfect. Violet expresses that she feels stuck inside the house. She starts to engage in self-pity and wishes she was more like Zoey.

Violet's mother calls her dramatic and tells her to stop acting like that. Violet asks her mother if she is okay with going out there if she is not perfect. Violet's mother asks Violet to get to the point. Violet recalls how the family went to her father's company picnic when she was ten years old, when she jumped into the pool. Violet reminds her mother of how she yanked Violet out of the pool, put her in the car, and that they left the picnic. Violet says she wonders how she would have been different if her mom had called her beautiful at that moment instead. Violet's mother responds, "You would not be marrying Clint" (Al-Mansour, 2018, 1:27:43). Violet agrees

with her mother's words. She tells her mother that she was taught to be the girl for guys and not for herself. Clint needs clarification about that statement. Violet says she wants to swim. Violet gets up and goes back to the engagement party barefoot. She immediately jumps in the pool, even though her mother tells her not to. After jumping in the pool, Violet tells everyone to join her. Zoey jumps in the pool, and everyone else joins her. Violet's father pushes her mom into the pool with him. Violet's mother's wig falls off. She screams at Violet's father. Violet's father tells her how beautiful she looks. Then they kiss. Violet looks over at Clint, who looks disappointed and upset. At that moment, she knows that their engagement is off. She does not get out of the pool. She keeps swimming.

After that scene, there is a sub-section in *New Growth* called *Nappily*. This scene opens with her pitching Will's natural hair products to a business. She has her hair in an afro style. Violet talks about the choice of beauty in her pitch. She talks about how there is beauty in every type of hair. Violet wins the pitch, and Will and Violet walk out of the meeting together. Will tells Violet to "change the world" (Al-Mansour, 2018, 1:32:38). Violet replies, "One head at a time" (Al-Mansour, 2018, 1:32:40). Violet then leaves and takes a walk. She is walking confidently with her natural hair. People around her are looking back at her beauty and grace. The movie ends with her walking and smiling with her short afro.

### *CTI Analysis*

On the personal layer, Violet views herself as confident, pretty, intelligent, and natural. Violet starts off this stage by wearing her natural afro hair in front of her mother. She became so confident in her hair that she wore it proudly in front of her mother. We also see that Violet stands up for herself at work and leaves when she feels undervalued. Violet realizes her growth and that it does not matter what makes others happy; she must make herself happy. This point is

dramatically made at the engagement when Violet tells her mom and Clint, “I want to go for a swim” (Al-Mansour, 2018, 1:28:16). The most powerful scene in the film is when Violet jumps into the pool, after conveying to her mother that she wishes her mother would have comforted her at the pool when the other kids made fun of her all those years ago at her father’s work function.

Now, Violet is no longer the scared little girl or the grown woman who would not let any water touch her hair. She is no longer constantly paranoid about rain and its impact on her hair. Now, she is a woman who can jump into a pool, freely, in front of everyone at her engagement party. At that moment, Violet is happy and free. She does not allow her hair to hold her back. In the end, Violet is proud of her hair and herself. She is single and defines her identity beyond her hair and beyond a man.

On the enacted layer, Violet expresses herself as confident in her appearance. She wears her hair natural at work when pitching the Amber Lite commercial. However, her confidence in her new look is put to the test when Clint asks Violet, “Just wondering if you do something?” referring to straightening her hair for the engagement party (Al-Mansour, 2018, 1:22:43). His statement makes Violet feel like her natural hair is insufficient. Violet does straighten her hair for the engagement part because of Clint's wishes. She showed at the party that she could be that perfect image everyone wanted to see. She does and says the right thing until it becomes too much for her. When Violet jumps into the pool, she shows she does not want to be perfect. She wants to be free. Later, we see that Violet regains her confidence and wears her hair naturally to pitch Will's natural hair care line. In this section, Violet expresses that she is confident in who she is.

In terms of the relational layer, the film shows how Violet started defining herself through her relationship with. Even though she has become happy and comfortable with her natural, kinky hair, when Clint asks her to straighten it she does. In doing so, she goes back to the identity that her mother has built for her. The scene where her mom is straightening her hair for the engagement party parallels the scene in the beginning of the film when her mom was straightening her hair for the surprise birthday party where they thought Clint would propose. The film shows how Violet starts to go back to the woman she once was. At the engagement party, she worries about pleasing everyone else. She wants to ensure everything is perfect for Clint and her mother. But we see the pain this strive for perfection causes when Violet tells her mother, "I wonder who I would be if you had just hugged me and told me I was still beautiful" (Al-Mansour, 2018, 1:27:28). Violet realizes her mom made sure she made everyone else happy. Violet's mother never taught Violet to make sure that she was happy. In the end, Violet stops defining herself through relationships. Her being single at the end shows no one influences or defines her identity.

The communal layer reflects how society shows that women they need to get their hair done as part of their preparation for a big event. In this movie, getting your hair done means getting it straightened. Straight hair is a societal standard, and Violet needed to meet it at her party. As Violet changes her hair, she also tries to change the way beer commercials are seen. Beer commercials are made to appeal more to men. Violet wants to change the narrative and appeal to both men and women. Lastly, Violet tries to change the way women love their hair. She does this by pitching Will's natural hair care line. Violet says, "Women can wear waves if they want to. They can straighten their hair if they want to. It's a choice, and there is nothing wrong with that. But we also need them to know there is beauty in their natural hair." (Al-Mansour,

2018, 1:31:24). She wants women to choose to wear their hair however they want. Violet tries to help change many societal standards. While some work out and others are do not. Nevertheless, Violet is proud of herself for trying to start the change.

Violet finally has learned to love herself beyond hair. She is proud of herself and her hair. She stays single and is happy with being by herself. Violet is a good role model for Zoey and she is proud of the woman she has become. The story ends with Violet getting her Nappily Ever After. She finally has the relationship with herself and her hair that she always wanted.

### **Ch. 5 Discussion**

I became interested in this subject after watching *Nappily Ever After* because I saw myself through the main character. I changed my hair throughout my young adult years because I wanted to change my identity. When I saw the film, I resonated with the main character and how she used her hair to change her identity. As a Black woman, I feel lost about my identity at times. I have a bunch of projections about my identity from friends, family, associates, and society. My confusion about my identity led me to analyze the film with CTI. CTI goes deeper than the surface level of identity. The theory examines family, friends, society, and self-evaluation and how they make up a person's identity.

Over time, during my thesis, I saw the film differently. At first, when I saw the film, I focused solely on the main character and how she viewed herself. Once I looked at the film through the lens of CTI, I expanded my perspective to see how everyone saw the main character. Focusing primarily on how the main character, Violet, became who she is.

*Nappily Ever After* shows how a Black female character links her identity to her hair. Using CTI to analyze the movie allowed me to see and analyze the identity of Violet in layers.

We see that how she perceives herself will enable others to perceive her, where her identity stems from, and how society helps shape her identity.

The portrayal of Violet as a Black woman is a crucial aspect of the movie. Violet's character embodies a Black girl's journey to becoming a Black woman, with her identity closely tied to her hair. The film depicts how Black women are often not taken seriously when they choose to keep their natural hair and how they can be subjected to ridicule and invisibility. This highlights the immense pressure that some Black women can face when it comes to hair-related challenges. The movie shows Black women learning to love themselves as they embark on a natural hair journey.

This thesis explores the significance of hair for Black women and how it contributes to their identity. Historically, Black hair has been viewed as a political or cultural statement, and discussions about it have often centered around societal standards. However, this paper shifts the focus to how Black women's hair is important to them and helps shape their identity. Hair is a crucial aspect of everyone's identity, and this thesis aims to encourage further analysis of hair in relation to different genders, races, and ethnicities.

In the straightening and new growth stages of the film, there are parallel pool scenes. In Straighten, Violet jumps into a pool, and her mother rejects her hair and, in doing so, rejects Violet. That childhood experience shapes her entire future. She started rejecting her natural hair to feel beautiful and get her mother's approval. In the New Growth scene, she jumps into the pool. She accepts her natural hair and is proud of it. She is not looking for her mother's approval; instead, she is learning to live by her approval. These parallel scenes show how Violet went from rejecting to accepting herself.

Films like *Nappily Ever After* convey the importance of hair to women. Many women can relate to changing their hair during different life events. Hair conveys parts of our identity, especially the part we want others to be able to see. While hair is essential to everyone, this film focuses on Black natural hair. Representation of this hair shows that it is worthy to be beautiful on-screen. Straight long hair is the Eurocentric beauty standard (Thompson, 2009). The beauty standard can make Black Afrocentric hair textures seem less than. People change their hair to feel the need to fit in, and the film also shows that self-acceptance and self-love are more important than artificial standards of beauty.

In my analysis, I found that Violet correlated her hair to significant events in her life. Initially, Violet was constantly paranoid about the weather, her hair, and her appearance. By the end, Violet learns to let go and love her hair for its natural state. In each stage, Violet perceives herself differently in the CTI layers. Violet's hair, on CTI's levels, had to do with the difference in her identity. When she wanted to be perfect, she kept her hair long and straight. When she tried to be fun, she changed her hair to blonde, straight, and medium length. When Violet was confused about her identity, her hair was bald—allowing her time to grow into the person she wanted to be. Having her hair bald was a fresh start for Violet. Lastly, when Violet figured out who she wanted to be and how she wanted others to perceive her. She kept her hair in its natural state.

My thesis expands on CTI by demonstrating that identity can be centered around a particular aspect of a person rather than their entire being. While CTI concentrates on a person's identity, it neglects to consider the unique traits that form part of their identity. The theory emphasizes how a person's identity is shaped by their relationships with friends, family, society, and themselves. By using CTI, I illustrate how Violet's identity was primarily associated with her

hair. My thesis broadens the scope of CTI by highlighting a person's distinctive characteristics and demonstrating how they can be directly linked to their identity.

Finally, *Nappily Ever After* is an important film because of its representation of Black women's hair and identity. It shows the diversity of Black women, which is often missing from mainstream mass media depictions, which too often show monolithic and stereotypical images of Black women and Black womanhood. Thus, it is an important evolution in the way Black identity has been represented in American film.

## **Ch.6 Conclusion**

This thesis analyzes the movie *Nappily Ever After* (2018), which focuses on a Black woman and how her identity is tied to her hair. CTI was used to analyze each layer of the main character's identity and each section of the film. My analysis revealed that both cultural identity and representation of Black women's hair are complex, dynamic and ever-changing in response to societal norms and in response to how individuals work to define themselves for themselves.

Historically, Black hair in America has changed during different eras to mean different things. Black hair has been a movement, a political demonstration, a cultural statement, and more. Although films have incorporated more Black Americans in their movies, some Black hair textures are still underrepresented in the mass media, however, *Nappily*, and other works like it – such as Issa Rae's award-winning series *Insecure* – move the industry towards more diverse representations in film.

This thesis aimed to focus on how some Black women have tied their identity to their hair. My theoretical analysis using CTI showed how Black women can tie their identity to their hair. It also identified different reasons why this can occur, such as defining your identity through relationships or authority figures like parents, trying to meet societal expectations, and defining

your own identity through how you perceive yourself. Thus, this thesis sheds light on the underrepresented subject of Black hair; it shows how hair communicates a variety of meanings and opens the door for additional studies about hair, identity, race, and ethnicity.

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