

Rhetorical Analysis

Mariam Coulibaly

City College of New York

Professor Anna Voisard

Spring Writing for The Sciences

2/13/2024





For my Rhetorical Analysis I chose to write about a video ad on PCJ relaxer. I chose to write about this because I found it to be texturist and insulting towards black people with 4c hair. And because the many comments of black women talking about

their experiences with this Ad and how it hurt their confidence as a child. And it even damaged people's hair and caused them to go bald. The Ad starts out with a black girl and her mom sitting at the kitchen table. The mother doing her daughter's natural hair and struggling to comb through it, leaving the daughter in visible pain. Then clipping to another kid with relaxed hair straight and showing the same mom easily combing through their hair. And this daughter is no longer upset or in pain, but happy and relaxed. The Black mother in this Ad is also the narrator. She uses her credibility of being a fellow black woman and mother who also had natural hair. To persuade other black women to use this relaxer. Using ethos to persuade the audience, Black women, and black moms she uses that commonality of them all being black women with the same hair struggles as a reason for them to trust her when she says that relaxed hair is simply better. Because she knows the struggle of maintaining her natural hair and her daughter's.

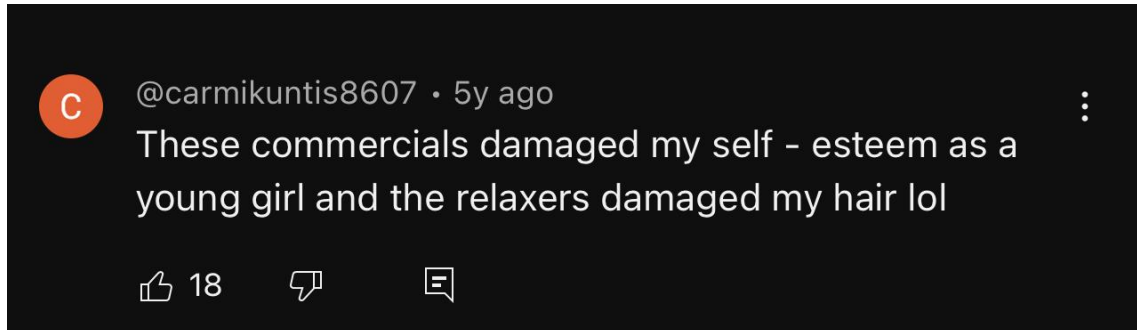
This Ad was made in 1987, in the 80s there were ongoing debates on natural hair in the workplace. Employers felt that natural hair was unprofessional for the workplace and was seen as unusual and extreme. An example of this being the 1981 ruling of *Rogers v. American*

Airline, which legally upheld employers' right to prohibit categorically the wearing of braided hairstyles in the workplace. This stopped many black African American women from getting jobs with their natural hair. Highly suggesting that alterations to their natural hair be made like perms or relaxers to meet the standard of appearance. As the usual standard that was expected was straight hair. Something that reflected into the media and products of the time. Which meant being a Black woman and or mother in a time where you would be denied a job if your hair did not meet a standard of straight hair. And having to alter their hair to get a job to provide for their family factors which were reflected in the media and products of that time.

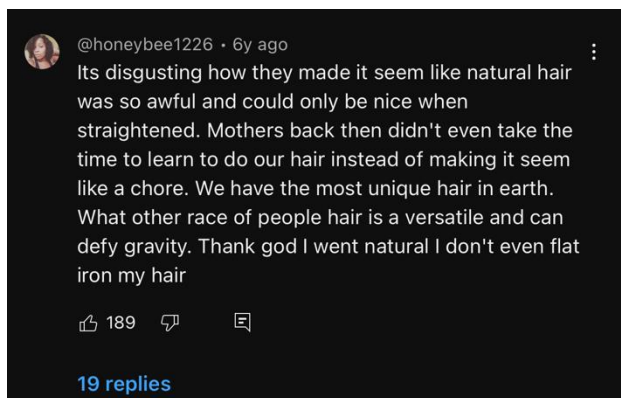


when looking at this Ad its noticeably clear that natural and relaxed hair are being compared to one another. And that natural hair is seen as unmanageable and hard to do, while relaxed straight hair is seen as manageable, easy, and pretty. One example of this in the Ad was the way the natural hair was shown in comparison to the straight hair. When the Ad starts the girl getting her natural hair done is in black and white, while the girl with the relaxer is in full blooming color. When things are put in darker colors it makes it look more brooding, or depressing and serious as opposed to when things are in bright colors, it is seen as fresh new, happy, more attractive to the eyes. So, when the girl with natural hair was in black and white, the

purpose was to not only represent it being in the past, but also being an undesirable past. While the girl with relaxed hair was a desirable future that, was happy and joyful.



However, what I felt was most upsetting about this Ad is not its use of diction and word play when talking down on natural hair. But who this Ad targeted as its audience. At first glance of the Ad, it clearly is directed to adult black women and black moms with daughters. But when you look into the comments section, you will see women who were children at time this Ad was airing on tv. Talking about how this ad ruined their confidence as a child and self-image and even damaged their hair in the process. As children we are incredibly impressionable and what we experience can impact us greatly through our development.



So, when Ads for things like relaxer come on and it represents natural hair in such a bad light. Hair that come out of these young black girl's scalp. In a time where their hair is already being contested as unprofessional and unusual. It leaves an impression on these

young children that their hair is not good enough. Ultimately meaning that they are not good enough as their hair is a part of them. As girls we already grow up with a list of beauty standards

that hurt our body image. And it is especially harmful when the person telling young black girls to change is characterized as a black mother with her own child.



Ultimately the PCJ Ad, while successful in its use of rhetorical strategies, raises questions on the broader impact of beauty advertisements on one's self-perception and societal norms. And the message pushes on societal pressure and beauty ideals. Along with who may be its underlying audience in addition to its targeted one. Like for this example young black girls and how it negatively affects them. And that the lasting mental and physical effects that may follow due to being influenced by these advertisements.

Library guides: Title VII's application of grooming policies and its effect on black women's hair in the workplace: Rogers v. am. airlines, inc., 527 F. supp. 229 (S.D.N.Y. 1981). Rogers v. Am. Airlines, Inc., 527 F. Supp. 229 (S.D.N.Y. 1981) - Title VII's Application of Grooming Policies and its Effect on Black Women's Hair in the Workplace - Library Guides at University of Missouri Libraries. (n.d).
<https://libraryguides.missouri.edu/c.php?g=593919&p=4124519>

PCJ relaxer AD (1987). YouTube. (2010, June 2).
<https://youtu.be/IWmCPrl83uQ?si=PXYIKfR01EKZclSn>