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Is It Because of My Hair?: Young Black Women, Hair and Professionalism

Artist's Statement

In preparing my documentary for my thesis, my mentor and I have come to realize that my project takes on a form that may be considered more of an artistic thesis than a research one. Documentaries can be expressed in many modes, as outlined by Bill Nichols, a theoretician best known for his extensive work with documentary. There are six modes of documentary: expository, poetic, observational, participatory, performative, and reflexive. Though each form has qualities that make it unique from the others, the lines often blur when determining which mode best describes the documentary being made.

My documentary takes the performative mode, which is defined as being a mode that the filmmaker herself is an active agent in. This mode is also considered to be diary mode or self-reflexive mode. I chose this mode because I fit the category of people being explored in my documentary: African American females with “natural” hair. An instrumental part of my documentary was using video journals to convey my own personal experiences to the audience. As the filmmaker, I was able to record my video journals and edit them whenever I was able, which made the process much more convenient. Despite the convenience however, I was truly interested in playing a role in my documentary. I wanted the audience to see that despite the fact that I may be good at what I do, there are still obstacles that may pose a threat to my future in this particular area.

The art of documentary is very subjective, and I was eager to give my piece a flavor that was all my own. I included certain artistic choices that I think allowed the piece to benefit overall. For instance, I decided to include racist and derogatory images to shock audiences, and allow them to see the root of the conventions of natural hair. I additionally chose to counter those images with positive photographs of African American women, to express the dignity with which many women wore their natural hair.

Overall I would say that my documentary has accomplished many goals, and has been established as a performative and artistic documentary that explores the stigmas and conventions with the natural hair of African American females in the workplace.