Public Abstract

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Title: PETALS FALLING OFF A ROSE: THE EFFECT OF HAIR LOSS ON WOMEN'S IDENTITY PERFORMANCES

This dissertation analyzes twenty-six interviews with women who have temporary hair loss, thinning hair, or alopecia to learn how hair loss affects women's sense of self and behavior when interacting with others. Experiencing hair loss often challenges women's sense of self, challenges attitudes towards beauty, femininity, and appearance, and requires them to realign their sense of self with their new appearance. This project examines how these processes differ for women depending on the type of hair loss they have. Women with temporary hair loss wait out their hair loss by trying to look healthy and feminine while wearing wigs until their hair grows back. Women with thinning hair have trouble adjusting to their hair loss because it marks a change from their earlier appearance and sense of self. They cope with their hair loss by making sure that it is not noticeable when interacting with others, particularly when they are at work. Women with alopecia focus on hiding their hair loss from others as well as trying to look beautiful, feminine, and healthy. This project concludes with a discussion of what this study tells us about what it means to have a healthy identity. The purpose of this study is to help increase awareness of women's hair loss in the United States.