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Does My Hair Bother You? Part 1

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Does My Hair Bother You? Part 1

Abstract

“It’s AMAZING that it’s considered revolutionary to wear my hair the way it grows out of my head...” – Tracie Thoms

I don’t wear my natural hair because I want to join the “revolutionary movement” that has recently swept across our nation. I’m not desperately seeking to get in touch with my roots. Nor do I desire to be acknowledged as the soulful “sista” that eats, sleeps and breathes “[Black Power](#)“. I wear my natural hair because I was naive enough to ignore warnings of the effects that Gettysburg’s harsh water would have on my “black hair”. So it fell out. Simple as that. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Surge, Surge Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Center for Public Service, sexuality, gender, social norms, shaving, hair removal, female body

Disciplines

Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies | Gender and Sexuality | Sociology | Sociology of Culture | Women's Studies

Comments

Surge is a student blog at [Gettysburg College](#) where systemic issues of justice matter. Posts are originally published at [surgegettysburg.wordpress.com](#) Through stories and reflection, these blog entries relate personal experiences to larger issues of equity, demonstrating that –isms are structural problems, not actions defined by individual prejudice. We intend to popularize justice, helping each other to recognize our biases and unlearn the untruths.

SURGE

[VERB] : to move suddenly or powerfully forward or upward

DOES MY HAIR BOTHER YOU?: PART 1

July 15, 2013

"It's AMAZING that it's considered revolutionary to wear my hair the way it grows out of my head..." – Tracie Thoms

I don't wear my natural hair because I want to join the "revolutionary movement" that has recently swept across our nation. I'm not desperately seeking to get in touch with my roots. Nor do I desire to be acknowledged as the soulful "sista" that eats, sleeps and breathes "[Black Power](#)". I wear my natural hair because I was naive enough to ignore warnings of the effects that Gettysburg's harsh water would have on my "black hair". So it fell out. Simple as that.

I didn't stop getting relaxers because I thought I was betraying my people, and I didn't start getting relaxers because I wanted to look "white". I also didn't stop wearing weaves because I felt unauthentic, just like I didn't start wearing weaves to portray a more "European" look. I simply cut it out of my budget to start saving for a car my senior year.

But regardless of how I see my justifications for choosing to wear my natural hair, the truth remains that my hair is political. Society embraces straight hair with open arms. Now, this straight hair may have a few waves, maybe some curls, but not as tight as those found on the head of a woman with a 4A curl type like myself (Yes, there is an actual [quiz](#) to classify your curl type). Sadly, 4A is not considered normal, mainstream, or favorable (neither is 3C, 4B or 4C for that matter). It is not embraced, it is not considered professional, and is debatably frowned upon as "unattractive". These are common issues that black women face as a result of wearing their natural hair. It is hardly ever assumed that a black woman wears her natural hair because she likes it. No one assumes there is anything likable about kinky, coily, or nappy hair. Even if someone is polite enough to compliment the complexity of my black hair, I know that they would never in a million years consider it desirable. And so that bravery associated with wearing my 4A curl type hair, knowing all of these things, is what makes my hair political.

Isn't that amazing? That a black woman's natural hair (whether she wants it to be or not) has become a symbol of rebelliousness and defiance in opposition of the norm!



I do not believe that my “coily springy” (4A) hair makes me look like a slave. My hair signifies my race, like the color of my skin, which makes for double the stereotypes. I didn’t carefully sculpt an asymmetrical fro to get attention, I simply felt a little edgy that day. Nor do I feel the need to straighten my hair to be seriously considered for a job opportunity. I am not denying that relaxing black hair has become a subconscious statement that suggests a desire to “fit in” with [white standards of beauty](#), but I refuse to allow someone to point their finger and tell me that I did it because I wanted to look “white”.

Yes, my [hair is political](#) and politics are complex.

I cannot speak for all black women on their reasons for “going natural”. For some women, it may actually be an act of protest, making a statement about [continued racial injustice](#) in this country. Or, some women may refuse to buy into the black hair market because they see that most businesses geared towards black hair care [are not owned by African-Americans](#). There are women who are against the harsh chemicals that damage their hair and make their scalp hurt. Some prefer to save their money for things that seem more important than an expensive hairdo. Others enjoy the flexibility of their natural hair and the styles that it enables them to create. There are dozens of reasons why black women choose to wear their natural hair, so let me just remind you that not every woman with a fro is looking to revolt.

I would love to tell you that going natural was an easy transition for me, but I can’t. I love my hair. I love doing my hair. I love spending hours watching [tutorials on fun styles](#) for my very versatile and complex hair. But I am also extremely self-conscious about my hair. I am anal about it’s perfection, in fear of appearing rough or poorly groomed. I am certain to pluck my eyebrows to decrease the chances of my facial front appearing as an “uncivilized” untamed mishap. I cling to my make-up, which for me, only consists of eyeliner, mascara and lipstick, but makes me feel a hell of a lot more feminine than the curly hair that barely reaches my neck.

You’re probably wondering why I wear my natural hair if it makes me feel this way?

I admit it’s a challenge. For me, it’s about caring for my natural hair in the town of Gettysburg where there are limited hair stores and salons equipped with stylists and supplies to accommodate the complexity of my 4A hair. It’s about the freedom that comes with being able to dive into the pool or walk through the rain without my hair being completely ruined. That *relief*, that *feeling*, to me, is revolutionary and worth a little self-consciousness.

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<http://surgegettysburg.wordpress.com/2013/07/15/does-my-hair-bother-you-part-1/>