

Hair Revolution

In the wake of the 2020 events with the Black Lives Matter Movement and the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, it was as if the world suddenly became aware of the injustices and violence enacted on Black people. Seas of blacked-out boxes on social media accounts surfaced as people took notice of the injustices and criminal actions of white police officers on young black lives.

So, in the middle of the summer during a pandemic, I felt lost. The violence enacted on Black people and people of colour were happening and I was shut out by the global pandemic. But, as my sister poignantly commented: “Now everyone has a glimpse into the pain we have felt our entire lives. To live as a Black woman is an act of protest in and of itself.”

I thought about her remark and how racism systemically and institutionally works to denigrate Black lives. In my own life, my hair has been a marker of my race and a target of racism, by other people, the media, and culture. It has been this unwritten rule that Black women either hide, protect, or do not discuss their hair. ‘Wearing it’ out naturally is an act of protest and revolt.

I was inspired by the actions and demonstrations of African American, British Black, and African Canadian people to revolt against oppressive systems that affect my everyday life. Since my hair had been a sore spot for me growing up, I decided to tend to it like a garden. Strangely, I never saw my hair as my own, but rather an appendage of indignation and struggle.

So, on July 14th, 2020 I decided to search for “ways to grow black hair.” I was bombarded by beauty blogs and advertisements on hair care products titled things such as “magical grow” and “miracle afro care”. I felt overwhelmed by the targeted ads by people that did not look like me.

I almost gave up before I stumbled upon a YouTuber by the name of “Ebony’s Curly TV”. I was dumbfounded by how long and beautiful her natural hair was and how she discussed the process of growing her hair as intimately tied to loving your hair. Apart from that, she suggested rice water and ample Black-owned conditioning products geared to Black hair.

So, I had the recipe for hair growth. A combination of self-love, rice water, and Black owned hair products and conditioners. The aim to grow my hair was never for length, or to wear out in the winter, but to close the gap between myself and my insecurity about my hair. Fast forward to September, when my hair had grown four inches and was past my shoulders. I had a Diana Ross-looking afro, and I loved it. I in my own way was taking back what was mine all along. I was no longer burdened by the need to imitate the dominant culture in order to feel accepted or understood.



Throughout my hair growth journey, I reflected on how my education, the Black Lives Matter movement, and my personal experiences shaped how I positioned myself within culture, society and the world.

I really thought about how racism and self-hate separate the Black body from their sense of self and

worth. Colonialism and imperialism also worked to embed ideas about Black women in order to forget themselves; to make room for the dominant culture's ideals. To grow my hair and fulfil my birthright is a revolutionary act that opposes the status quo. Black hair also symbolizes a larger structural contention regarding the frequent fetishization of Black women and their "kinky" natural hair. It makes Black women feel that they must assimilate themselves within a normative culture to be taken seriously or considered beautiful. Beauty standards, especially for women of colour, are always in relationship with white hegemonic standards of beauty, which commodify white standards for black women to aspire to, purchase and adopt.

As I think about the events of the Black Lives Matter movement, I hate to see that Black lives become martyrs; alarm clocks for the dominant culture to wake up and understand

that inequality and injustice affect the everyday.

I carry the words of Kimberle Crenshaw and Patricia Hill Collins, who discuss the importance of intersectionality and how this affects the individual. Crenshaw's intersectionality speaks to how multidimensional oppression can affect a single individual, which can be in dialogue with cultural Black features like hair (Crenshaw, 2016).

References

Crenshaw, K. (2016, October). The urgency of intersectionality. Retrieved January 28, 2020, from https://www.ted.com/talks/kimberle_crenshaw_the_urgency_of_intersectionality?language=en.