

A Black Woman's Natural Gift Is a Curse in Some People's

Anonymous

Department of English Anoka Ramsey Community College

English 1121: College Writing and Critical Reading

Prof. Chris McCarthy

April 24, 2023

When I was a kid, remember seeing my mother preparing for a wedding ceremony while plaiting her hair with a wig; she got hurt by a needle and started bleeding with the blood, but she continued plaiting her hair. In the article “Black women’s hair is about our ancestry, our being, our identity” from *USA TODAY*, Alesia I. Redding (2023) argues that for a Black woman, her hair can be her “crowning glory”, which is something that she takes pride and dignity in. She also mentions that black women do not just take pride in themselves as a “crowning glory”, but it is also a reminder of her cultural heritage and history. She points out that if one asks a black woman about her hair not only is she going to tell you the “perm and dreadlock” but she also going to tell you about “beauty standards, workplace culture, about the pressure to assimilate.” She continues, “While interviewing a black woman about her hair she might inform you that historically, so-called ‘good hair,’ i.e., straight hair, has been prized within the Black community”. In this article, Redding 2023 talks about her conversations with a couple of black women and their experience wearing their natural black hair. One person makes mentions,” Michelle Obama’s recent assertion that she straightened her hair during her husband’s tenure in the White House because Americans were “not ready “for her natural hair at the time”. Another person talks about “The extra pressure to fit in “and Another woman again talks about people sending their opinions in her inbox. Overall, Redding talks about the social pressure black women go through when wearing their natural hair and the mass expenses for keeping up with straight hair like wearing weaves, buying hair products, shampoo, conditioner grow, etc.

I agree with Redding (2023) and the experience of those black women she interviews. These are experiences I can personally relate to with my mothers, Sister, and wife, but at the same, about solutions to these social struggles. I agree with Michelle Obama when she said Americans” were “not ready “for her natural hair at the time.” it is extra pressure to ‘fit in’ while wearing Black hair, and having Black hair is big business for the hair care industry, on the contrary, the Redding 2023 and the interviewee fail to point out solutions to these racial discriminations against black women wearing their natural hair.

At the beginning of the article, the first interview of Redding 2023 interview Debra Stanley, points out Michelle Obama’s statement about wearing a straight in the White House and said “Obama's statement reminded me of the time many years ago when my big sister, then in her early 20s, was hired as a waitress. She wore her hair in braids when she interviewed for the job. But after she was hired, her employers told her that she'd have to remove the braids to keep the job. Isn't this sad, this is something I can relate to as my grandmother told me about her own experience while working for a white family when she first came to the US, she said at the time she worked as a maidservant for a white family in Pennsylvania while wearing her natural black, the boss lady look at her one day and say to her that she won't tolerate her grandmother wearing braided hair and coming to work because it doesn't suit their matches their cultures? My grandmother told her boss-lady that she cannot afford wigs and other expensive hair products for straight hair, unfortunately, her boss-lady couldn't understand so, my grandmother was fired from her job. These are sad realities Black women have experienced over a long period of time now regardless of how qualified they are for a job and how well modestly they dress their

wearing their natural black is still a problem. My grandmother's experience affirms that Americans were not ready for natural black hair at that time, and we don't know whether Americans are ready for natural black hair currently.

In addition, Redding (2023) also interviews a lady named Wilder- Hamilton who talks about her experience wearing dreadlocks, she says it took some time for people to get used to her hair. She also said her white acquaintances would ask if they could touch her hair. She said, "I'd tell them that they could. And I took it as a teachable moment to explain Black hair." Wilder- Hamilton further went on to say, "I didn't have any issues with my hair in the workplace, but Black women are 30% more likely than other women to receive a formal grooming policy and be sent home due to their hairstyle in the workplace". I agree with Wilder-Hamilton's point that it's extra pressure to 'fit in'. There are a lot of experiences out there of black women struggling to fit in with society and their jobs. One example is about a military student from Mr. Christopher McCarthy's course. She writes an article explaining her experience wearing her natural Black while serving in the military. She writes, "In the military natural black hair is not seen as professional and they make things hard for me to style my hair in a way they see fit." In one specific situation, she said.

Summer of 2016, I decided to cut all my hair off. Joining the military meant that while I was away at training, I would have to switch up my hair care routine. All my life my hair was relaxed, which means I put chemicals in it to make it straight. Cutting it allowed it to grow and it was the first time I dealt with my natural hair. When I got to basic training my hair was no more than an inch long. In basic training, there are drill sergeants in every corner that yell at you for the simplest of things. I will never forget the day a drill Sargent

stopped me in the chow hall and screamed no more than an inch from my face about how I didn't even try to do my hair. I was so confused; what did he think I was supposed to do to my inch-long hair? I was later confronted by my own drill sergeants, and they told me that I needed to put my hair in a cornrow (Natural Black Hair, Anonymous 2020).

Ironically, this could not happen to a white woman wearing her straight natural hair. But for black women, it is unprofessional to wear natural black hair, this is why I believe wearing natural black makes it extra pressure to fit with ideal professional hair, which is straight white hair. And has originated from the inferiority of black people from the early days of the slave trade. This inferiority was limited to black hair only, it was just about being black whether black skin, hair, or even the black culture was treated as inferior and such an inferiority complex has affected some black women who hated their natural decades.

Moreover, Redding (2023) also makes mention of a few statistics of black hair being a big business. She said, "In 2018, Black consumers spent \$ 473 million on hair products, which is 11.3% of sales for the \$4.2 billion hair industry. Black women spend \$1.1 billion annually on wigs, weaves, and extensions, in the U.S., Black consumers spend 18% of their annual income on hair care and beauty products". I absolutely, agree with Redding that having Black hair is big business for the hair care industries. For example, Black Influencers and celebrities, such as Tracee Ellis Ross and Issa Rae, have highlighted the importance of using products specifically designed for black hair. This has led to increasing awareness and demand for black hair care products. According to NielsenIQ, "By 2024, the buying power of the U.S. Black population is set to reach \$1.8 trillion. Yet despite this, their needs are still not being met by many beauty and

personal care brands.” Further NielsenIQ also mentions that the Black population in the U.S. is likely to increase by 18%, positioning black shoppers as an ever-growing consumer group that demands increased focus”. The high financial increase in Black hair shows how black hair is a big business in the hair industry. Yet, Black women are not being appreciated for wearing and taking care of their natural black hair. Like the story of Jakin Ingram, a law student from Ohio State University who struggles to fight hair discrimination while studying law. Ingram said “Quite literally I've been asked, 'So when was the last time you cut your hair twice this week,’” she also makes mention” Choosing my hairstyle, choosing my wig intentionally so I don’t have to deal with those questions is something that I quite literally deal with every single day.”

Furthermore, Redding (2023) and her interviewees talk about the various discrimination black women go through regarding their hair. I agree with them, but they did not talk about solutions to stop discrimination against black women. Redding (2023) used the entire article to talk about discrimination against black women’s hair particularly in the US. As she said in the introduction of the article “If you ask a Black woman about her hair, be prepared to hear about more than dreadlocks and perms. She might tell you about beauty standards, workplace culture, about the pressure to assimilate. She might inform you that historically, so-called good hair, i.e., straight hair, has been prized within the Black community”. This is why in the article “Why women are fighting back against hair oppression” written by Cache McClay. McClay (2019) makes mention of The CROWN Act (Creating a Respectful and Open Workplace for Natural hair) which was drafted and sponsored by State Senator Holly Mitchell to prohibit discrimination based on Black

women's hairstyle and hair texture by extending protection under the FEHA and the California Education Code. The discrimination against women for wearing their hair is something that almost every black woman in America can relate to without reading Redding's (2023) article whether from the media, or school, not to say that Redding's (2023) article is not educative and beneficial for black women, but I think black women need more solutions to solve these discriminations. The solution to solve the discrimination against black women wearing their natural black is the best way forward, one way to normalize black women's hair is by employers not making Straight hair as the default and preferably the ideal hair for a corporate for a Job. The one requirement for wearing therefore Redding (2023) and the interviewee should have provided many solutions to discrimination against black women wearing their natural black hair.

To conclude, I would first like to say, that Redding (2023) and her interviews would have done much better by also including the solutions or actions black women can take to prevent discrimination against wearing their natural hair or being the pride of their natural hair. However, I must admit that Redding's (2023) articles open my eyes to the true meaning of wearing natural black hair, not just about the "beauty standards, workplace culture, and the pressure to assimilate but it is something more, something deeper- something rooted in culture and a complicated history." Although I did not understand my mother when she insisted after getting hurt by a sharp needle to continue plaiting the wigs on her hair, now I understand what my mother and thousands of women go through daily, plaiting weaves and other hair extensions just to fit in with society and just to have straight hair.

References

Anonymous (2020, Feb 1). Natural Black Hair. *Christopher McCarthy English 1121 ARCC*.

NielsenIQ. (2022, Sept 08). Attracting Black beauty consumers in 2022. *NielsenIQ*.

<https://nielseniq.com/global/en/insights/analysis/2022/attracting-black-beauty-consumers-in-2022/#:~:text=Hair%20Care%20is%20the%20top,lucrative%2C%20making%20just%20%241.05B>.

Redding, A. (2023, Feb 3). For Black women, hair is about our ancestry, our being, and our identity.

USA Today. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2023/02/03/black-culture-hairstyles-hair-care-crown-act-african-american-michelle-obama/11155993002/>

Simeon, A. (2020, Oct 22). Black Celebs Are Transforming The Hair Aisle & Hollywood.

REFINERY29. <https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/2020/10/10044895/black-celebrity-hair-brands-industry-trend>

