

"Your hair looks nappy." This comment is one of many people have made about my hair. It's a comment that implies a negative connotation to my hair which made me feel insecure when I was younger. Whenever others made these types of comments towards me it crushed my self-esteem. It was mainly before I went to high school when kids or people made general comments about my hair. Back then I had an afro and sometimes twisted it into two-strand twists. When a black man has dreadlocks or twists in his hair, some people assume he's a "gangster" or a potential criminal. Based on their lack of education, colorism, or dumb stereotypes. There are biases with black hair and when raised around a different environment some people look at my hair as if it were some weird chemical accident, like it wasn't normal. There are others like me who have curly/coily natural hair, and I believe people who don't have my hair type should understand that people have discriminated against black people based on their hair and we should learn to be accepting of black hair. I also want the world to learn more about black hair and understand the deep history and culture of our hair.

Preconceived notions about black hair are deeply rooted in history and cultural contexts. These notions usually come from a combination of colonial histories, Eurocentric beauty standards, systemic racism, media representation, stereotypes, and lack of education. These notions go back to history during the era of European colonization. When African people were forced to migrate to various parts of the world it erased many cultural practices including traditional haircare methods. This change from African cultures to European ideals on beauty created a hierarchy that deemed European features, like straight hair, as superior. There have been times when black people were discriminated for this hairstyle. I'm not the only one who experiences this. Many black people experience this with their hair. For example, I saw online that some kids weren't allowed to graduate unless they cut off their hair. That kid had dreadlocks which is a similar hairstyle to two-strand twists. This is an extreme form of racism because someone's hair has nothing to do with graduating. The media could've played a role in this perception. Historically, mainstream media has often portrayed natural black hair negatively or as something to be "fixed" or "straightened." Limited representation of diverse black hairstyles perpetuates stereotypes and reinforces Eurocentric beauty ideals.

In addition, some people have chosen to be blatantly racist to me because of my hair and somewhat because of my skin color. I was in fifth grade, in a school that had mostly white people. I was one of the very few black kids. It was during a movie night at my school, and it happened a few times each school year after school. So, after school, I went with my friends and my brother to watch a movie at school. We went inside the gymnasium where they had a projector set up and the lights turned off. Everyone had brought blankets and there were mats set up for lying down to enjoy the movie. After some time watching the movie, I had to use the bathroom, so I went out of the gym and went to the bathroom. There was nobody there so after I finished using the bathroom I went out. Right when I stepped out of the bathroom, this white kid, who goes to the same school as me, comes out and says "nigger." He said this in front of my face and immediately ran away like he knew exactly how powerful that word was. I was initially confused, wondering why he would say that, but I quickly ran towards him in rage. I chased him down but then he had enough time to go back inside the gym and hide in the crowd. I went back to my friends and watched the rest of the movie feeling hurt. I told my friends about this after the movie, and they were just as confused as me. After going home, I chose not to tell the principal or any of the teachers. I only told my friends about this and went on through the school year. Every time I saw him, he would look at me like that day had never happened. I felt so weak. This was another very blatant and extreme act of racism. I should never experience something like that,

especially at such a young age. Even so, I should have informed my principal about this, and the principal would give the student a suspension for extreme racism like that.

Some looked at me like I was different. This didn't happen as much to me until my twists were long enough to cover my eyes. It would usually be white people who would make these assumptions and look at me in a different way. I'm not sure if it was fear, disgust, or just a mix of many emotions. It's not only white people though, one time I was walking down a sidewalk and there was an Asian family ahead of me. They chose to walk across the street onto the other sidewalk instead of walking around me on the same sidewalk. As I walked past them, I looked back, and they went back to the same sidewalk I was walking on. Looking back at this moment, this helped me realize that lack of education in other cultures can lead to a fear of other cultures. I assume now, that the Asian family who walked around me was afraid because they did not know me and only knew stereotypes about black people.

Some think my hair is dirty. There are people who assume dreadlocks/twists are dirty because of the way they look. This is because lighter skin tones have often been favored in societies influenced by colonial histories. This contributes to biases against those with darker skin and tightly coiled hair. Two-strand twists are not dirty, it's a protective hairstyle that reduces tangling, breakage, and shedding, something which commonly happens with black hair. When having twists, it's easy to keep it clean but people assume that because I don't wash my hair for 2 weeks it's "dirty." These racist stereotypes about black people can be weaponized to perpetuate discriminatory practices. Stereotypes associating natural black hair with being "unprofessional," "wild," or "untidy" may be used to justify discriminatory actions in employment, education, or other social contexts.

To summarize, people shouldn't make judgments based on my hair. We should learn to be accepting of different cultures. I somewhat understand why people make assumptions about me, it's because you fear what you don't know. You shouldn't assume things about other people based on stereotypes and physical appearance, try to get to know them first and judge them based on their character. If I could change the world when it comes to this topic, I would teach those who are skeptical of black hair about the true history of black hair. This would help people understand because ignorance and a lack of education about the diversity and beauty of natural black hair contribute greatly to preconceived notions and stereotypes. If people get educated about the rich history and cultural significance of different black hairstyles, they will stop relying on stereotypes and biases. Also, more representation of natural black hair in media and the celebration of diverse beauty standards can help challenge stereotypes, broaden perspectives, and can foster a more inclusive environment.