

The Stuff On Our Heads

Way back when, everyone used to say I looked like Rudy, from the Cosby Show, or Tootie, from "The Facts of Life."

These days, I scratch my head and wonder (which isn't good, because I'm due for a relaxer...ouch!). I don't think I ever looked like those people. Now I realize that the similarity was lying on my head. We all had those tight pony tails sticking out from every side of my head, or the rare special occasion where our hair was down with curled up bangs sitting on our forehead. Many ladies can relate. And for anyone who went to the hair dresser at a younger age, the grown ups, still sitting under the dryer in rollers, would look at you and say, "What pretty hair." These are memories I had of my hair.

Unfortunately, my most recent memory of my visit to the hairdresser left me quite angry and confused. This is because another woman stared at me, laughed and said, "I'd never seen anything like that before."

Now, this had never happened to me. I was quite surprised because I've been to hairdressers before, and no one ever laughed. We all look silly, goop on our heads, razors at the eyebrows, taking off our hair to reapply it later. I always felt comfortable, because we all were going through the same drama of trying to "fix ourselves." But this lady seemed to think differently. Apparently I looked a "different kind of silly."

Then I realized all my memories of hair involved being around black women. No one ever laughed because everyone's hair stuck up, everyone used what I liked to call a "little oven" to set the curling iron in. We all knew about braids, hair oil and "kitchens." Through it all, before and after, every woman there thought I was "pretty." It dawned on me that this was the first time I had been in a salon that wasn't specifically for black women.

I knew this originally and thought it was great that I can walk to a nearby salon instead of driving across town. Some businesses are putting forth an effort to cater to people of color. My biggest concern was not even about race. Ridiculously, I thought that since men came in too, they would discover women's beauty secrets.

I came to the conclusion that the lady laughing at me was not what made me angry, Mom and Dad taught me about ignorant folk. It was that I had worked so hard in the past to "keep going" when ignorant people got in my way, and I let a simple thing like hair rattle me. I let the topic be my hair instead of the ignorant person. And then I thought, "I should've had a smart remark, I could've taken a bus across town, I should've told

her, "well, this is different."

But is it different? Well, obviously in some technical aspects it is. Hair also means different things to different people. I find that for many Blacks hair is important. Doing each other's hair can be a social event. It may be this way for other cultures as well, and different or the same for people individually. That should not make my hair an oddity at the circus to others. People want to just go to a beauty salon and fall asleep while someone massages their scalp. Everyone wants to look good for that secret crush. People always have some sort of insecurity, gossip or story they want to share without feeling "different." In that case, hair does not have to be a big deal. I actually welcome people to ask me questions about my hair. Perhaps then they won't turn out like the ignorant lady. Sadly, she probably did not even know how much she hurt my feelings.

No matter which hair salon people enter, they should never let themselves leave wanting to pull out their hair in anger. They should remember their goal. Go in, have fun and remember to look in the mirror before leaving and say, "I look good."

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