

More Comfortable with My Curls

By: Maya Thames

For years black women relaxing and perming their hair has been a popular trend, making their hair straight in its natural state.

Today, the new trend for black women is going natural. No more perms or relaxers. These harsh chemical-based products have been traded in for healthier creams, puddings, and oils that derive from natural products. Products that promote growth and maintain healthy hair. This epic milestone movement has been encouraged by celebrities, youtube bloggers, and even the ordinary black woman looking for a more natural way of life. A more natural way of beauty.

But with beauty comes pain and sacrifice.

Organic.

Another hair day. Another few hours spent cooped up in her bathroom. Zaire Hagans-Jackson, an African American college student, looks into her bathroom mirror.

She grabs some 'pre poo', a hair product used to prevent the stripping of natural oils while shampooing. She dampens her hair with some water, and gets to work with a hard bristle paddle brush. The brush whose bristles wrestle with the tangles of her thick, full, kinky-curly clusters. The more she brushes, the easier it is to keep going.

Growing up with thick, full and curly Black girl hair isn't always the easiest thing. But as Jackson continues to love and nourishes her hair, day by day and year by year, she finds it easier to appreciate and manage.

Although she's not tender headed, her eyes still squint and teeth still grit as she pulls the brush through her curls. She actually loves it--- her natural God-given beauty. She doesn't like perms, relaxers or harsh chemical treatments. She likes her hair just like she likes her food. Organic.

Growth.

Her hair has been natural pretty much all of her life.

"From preschool to middle school my hair was always in its natural state unless I had braids," Jackson said.

In high school, she added a little color but soon rinsed it out .

Her mother did not believe in using relaxers on her children because of the damage harsh chemicals do to black hair. She's been a victim of relaxers herself.

Jackson's curls have always been there, whether visibly defined or not. Regardless of all of her friends having perms, she still kept her hair natural.

"I have this valuable connection with my hair. It's like I am my hair and my hair is me." Jackson said.

But nothing is perfect. And Black girl hair is not easy to manage.

Jackson has 4 type hair. A combination of 4b and 4c. Black girls' kinks and curls range from type 3a to 4c. This is on a scale of 1a, being the straightest, and 4c being the curliest. This hair chart was created in the 1990's by Andre Walker, Oprah Winfrey's stylist.

When curls aren't defined, people in society usually see the hair as 'nappy.' Typically people who do not understand Black hair. This surprisingly includes some ignorant Black people.



Undefined (Left), Defined (Right)

"Nappy" is a derogatory term that has been used for centuries. Although black women in today's society have 'reappropriated' the word to embrace their Black hair, the original use of the term was used to describe a black person's hair. For example, the movie 'Nappily Ever After' starring Sanaa Lathan, about a woman who learns to embrace her natural hair despite society's standards and stereotypes.

An independent 2005 documentary, "My Nappy Roots: A Journey Through Black Hair-itage" released, highlighting over 400 years of history behind natural hair. The film educated its viewers, portraying a realistic picture of Afro hair culture. In the title, the word nappy is used and embraced as a word of truth rather than hate.

Jackson remembered hearing this word on a daily basis if she wore her natural hair out ever since elementary school. Although this “n” word wasn’t as powerful, to her it still hurt.

Growing up, she used to feel less confident. She would question her natural beauty because of society’s european “standards.”

In 2016 Jackson committed to Hampton University, where she initially thought that her curls would be more welcomed. She thought that an HBCU (Historically Black College/University) would be a safe haven to let it all out but after her arrival she still felt like she was being judged.

“When I first came here, not anymore, but at first it felt like I just wasn’t presentable enough,” she said.

Then overtime, her perspective changed.

“I’ve learned that getting to love my natural hair helps me to love myself,” she said. Going into Hampton, she knew that she wanted to leave a mark. But she never envisioned it to be through hair.

Advocacy.

For the 2018-2019 academic school year, Jackson was selected to represent the popular new organization at Hampton, Campus Curlz, whose mission is “to enhance, educate and uplift those on campus and in the community through educational support and community service,” Nia Wellman, creator of Campus Curlz said.

The group was founded in 2015 by student Nia Welman, a natural hair enthusiast and Youtube blogger.

Welman saw Jackson’s potential and her passion to promote self-beauty.

“She’s extremely dedicated and shows up for community service. Jackson wasn’t only dedicated to the organization but also its mission,” said Welman.

Jackson loves to be a natural hair advocate.

“It feels great,” she said. “Because you help people learn and appreciate themselves more.”

The Trend.

Although this new natural wave has convinced many, it has not been convincing to all.

Natural hair products can be expensive, plus the cost begins to add up as you go through these products. Not to neglect that the execution of care can be time consuming, tedious and tiring (especially for a woman's arms). Black women's hair is naturally thicker and fuller than women of other descent. Thicker hair requires not only more care but also more product.

Relaxers for black women have been seen as a break and easy way out for black hair care. Black women use relaxer or perms to permanently change the natural texture of their hair.

The chemicals potassium hydroxide or calcium hydroxide make this transformation by breaking down bonds in the hair shafts. This leaves the hair brittle and weak causing breakage and hair loss.

The chemical paste is to be blended together per box instructions. Then spread throughout the hair and left in for about 13-18 minutes depending on the coarseness of the hair and later rinsed out. The longer the mixture sits, the stronger the chemicals work.

Healthy natural hair has been seen as empowering in the black community. But let's reference our First Lady, Michelle Obama, one of the most powerful and well-respected black female figureheads in not only America but the world. She has always been seen in the spotlight with straight hair. Whether her said was pressed down or slicked back, she is typically seen without her natural curl pattern.

In 2012, a picture of Mrs. Obama with a photoshopped afro hairstyle began to circle the internet. The public was so fascinated with seeing a high ranking black woman with a natural hair that the photo went viral.



Starting in 2012, relaxer sales have fallen by 36.6 percent in the United States.

Even a Black man, celebrity Chris Rock, created a documentary exposing the truths of the women's Black hair culture. It's entitled, "Good Hair," something that all Black women try to achieve.

For years, the Black society has deemed “good hair” to be “mixed hair.” Hair with looser, thinner curls or even simply straighter hair. That’s why relaxers play a huge role in this community.

Rock exposes the art of relaxers and all of its amenities. Not only the power that it has to change the natural pattern of someone’s hair but it’s real harmful effects and damage. He also covers the origin of wigs and weaves. Rock even travels to an Indian temple where woman provide their hair for sale in order to supply our Black American demand for these wigs, weaves and extensions.

Studies show today that Although this society is changing, as millenials are the most accepting of natural hair, bias against natural hair is still a societal issue, especially in the workplace, according to *The Good Hair Study* by Perception Institute.

"A majority of people, regardless of race and gender, hold some bias towards women of color based on their hair," according to the study. The most bias against Black natural hair, America’s most popular gentrifiers--- white women.

The facts conclude that white women deem black natural hair as “less beautiful,” “less sexy,” and less professional.

Natural hair in the workplace has and is still a legal issue to this day.

Earlier this year, a Black woman by the name of Chasity Jones was denied the opportunity to fight for justice for her natural. Jones was revoked from a job because of the natural state of the hair that grows out of her head.

Jones interviewed for and was offered a customer service representative job with Catastrophe Management Systems (CMS). Jones was told by the white HR manager, Jeannie Wilson, that she could have the job only if she got rid of her locs. Jones questioned this ultimatum and received this answer.

“They tend to get messy, although I’m not saying yours are, but you know what I’m talking about,” the lawsuit says. Jones declined to change her hair,” Wilson said.

The U.S. Supreme court still in 2018 has refused to address the lawsuit that Jones filed against CMS in 2010.

Back to Jackson-

During 2015, the year that Jackson was preparing to transition to college, Black natural hairstyling products increased by 26.8 percent. These products accounted for 35 percent of Black hair care market sales.

By 2020, when Jackson is due to graduate, relaxers are predicted to downfall to the smallest market in the haircare industry, according to a Mintel study.

A Black Girl's Regimen.

Healthy hair means a healthy Jackson.

She first detangles for about thirty minutes. The hardest yet most essential part, making the hair easier to brush/comb through, preventing knots and tangles that cause hair loss.

The 'pre poo' or pre-conditioning stage can take about ten to fifteen minutes or overnight.

Next, she shampoos after pre poo has been rinsed out. The complete shampoo cycle can be ten minutes to an hour long.

Now, the part her arms hate... again. She detangles before conditioning and combing, which takes another six minutes.

This next step is optional. Deep conditioning. Similar to conditioning but the product is heavier and left in longer from 15 minutes to three hours.

Finally she rinses everything out and usually feels so refreshed. Like she just rejuvenated and redefined her curls. For a white person, this is the end of the regimen. But black girl hair requires more attention. Styling.

"I usually throw my hair in a bun. It's just so much easier to do when I'm always so busy," she said.

For a slick bun she dries her hair leaving it damp enough to style. With a hard bristle brush, she strokes her curls in whichever direction she desires the bun to sit. Then she slicks back the hair with styling gel and ties it into a bun, sometimes slicking down her baby hairs too.

To be sure that everything stays in place, she ties her hair with a silk scarf for about twenty minutes or overnight.

Another option is a twistout or a braid out. She does this style so that her hair is flat while she sleeps at night, plus it's a more comfortable protective style.

She parts her hair into six to eight sections, stroking product throughout her hair to loosen her curls and braids/twists each section taking about forty-five minutes to an hour. She may wear this style overnight under a scarf or during the day under a hat.

When it's time to unravel, her reveals curls that match the pattern of her twists or braids. Twists usually have looser curl results while braids make tighter curls.

This is her weekly sometimes bi-weekly hair regimen.

Prices and Sacrifices.

Black hair care products are pricey but ever since Jackson was titled Ms. Campus Curlz, she gets a lot of free black haircare samples.

"I haven't bought them [natural hair product] since high school," Jackson said with nonchalance.

However, when she does buy product she gets organic coconut oil, olive oil and Dr. Bronners.

"It's this really cool brand that I've been using since middle school," she said. "It's for your hair, body, face...everything!"

The Black hair care market sales are projected to increase up to \$1.4 trillion by the year of 2020, according to a Mintel study.

Shampoos range from \$12 to \$20 with organic and natural products in the higher range, especially sulfate-free brands.

Conditioners can start at low as six dollars, while more expensive and richer conditioners cost anywhere from \$10-\$30. Most invest in conditioners because holding in moisture is an extremely important for Black hair.

Styling products give hair 'hold' and define curls for at least \$4-\$12. It's possible to even purchase flaxseeds to make hair gel for \$7. Not only is unprocessed flaxseed healthier for the hair, but the supply should last up to three to four months.

A Dilemma.

Perms can be a form of self-hate, according to Jackson.

Although perms and relaxers are extremely damaging to hair over time, the reason for using the perm matters.

Jackson's older sister got a relaxer after she left home. Jackson's niece (daughter of her older sister) was given a relaxer by her mother.

"I mean... guess I get it," Jackson said. "My sister says she gave my niece a perm because it's easier."

Jackson's sister is a wife and a mother with a full-time job. She has a busy everyday schedule. She has to get her daughter ready for school, clean around the house, work a full-time job, and still take care of herself.

Jackson understands.

With a perm, it's easier to brush and style black hair within less than half of the time it would if it isn't.

"What about being true to yourself and Black pride? I'm worried about the effect that the perm will have on my niece and her hair," said Jackson.

Jackson is not trying to convert every black girl to "go natural." She wants to encourage people to do whatever they want.

"Do what makes you happy with your hair, just be honest be honest with yourself," she said.

Even she wears, wigs, weaves, braid extensions etc. But just because a woman wears these protective styles, doesn't mean she hates her natural hair because, "I love my natural hair," Jackson said.

These protective styles actually help promote growth and maintain healthy hair when taken care of correctly.

"We live in an age of artistic expression," Jackson said in support of wearing different hairstyles.

Wearing different styles is not demeaning. Different is okay but maintaining a health body and hair is even more important.

Love.

Every little Black girl has had at least one "swim cap moment." Their mother sits them down in between her knees. The girls hair is in braids, wrapped around her head, or pulled back.

The mother grabs the rubber cap and hovers it over her child's head, stretching caps opening as far apart horizontally as she possibly can with her fingers. She then places the cap on the girls head and tugs, pulling it down one side at a time. Occasionally the cap slaps the child's temple. Then once the cap gets lower on the head, it slaps the ears.

“Hold still, stop moving, or you not going in,” she says to her daughter.

Mom is still tugging and pulling.

Finally the cap is on and it's tight. So tight that it slightly pulls back the skin near the side of child's eyes, stretching them to appear squinty. The child huffs and moans from discomfort. But Mom doesn't mind. She's happy because she believes that her girl's hair is safe and will not have to be thoroughly taken care of afterwards because of the cap.

The little girl runs, jumps into the pool, and plunges under the water. As she emerges from beneath, a gush of water leaks from underneath her cap.

Her mother stands and witnesses the whole scene. She stares at her child with a hysterical hopelessness. She then walks to her chair, slips on her glasses, opens her favorite James Patterson book and laughs.

Mom doesn't get mad at her child because of love. She understands that as a Black mother, who's raising a Black daughter, hair must be properly cared. Her mother cared for her hair, and she must carry-on that same duty because of love. One day her daughter will be doing her own hair out of love for herself.

Jackson tugs and pulls her dampened curls apart with her paddle brush to prepare to wash out of self-love. She regularly and articulately nourishes her head full of hair out of love.

After two hours of the regular pre-poo, shampoo and conditioning regimen, she towel dries her hair from her last rinse. She sighs in relief, drops the towel, looks in the mirror and smiles. She's not done yet, because she still has to style. But she's happy because she loves her healthy hair and she loves herself.