

COMPELLING COMMENTS

Falling in Hair Love Comes Naturally

Emmanuella Oduguwa, BS¹, Danyal Tahseen, BS²

¹University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center, Dallas, TX

²University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston, McGovern Medical School, Houston, TX

Afro-textured hair refers to the spectrum of naturally curly hair occurring in African-American, Afro-Caribbean and indigenous African women. The retro-curvature of the bulb and elliptical shaft in Afro-textured hair contrast to the straight shape of hair follicles common among Caucasians.¹ Although wearing Afro-textured hair in natural styles, such as afros, protects hair from potentially harmful chemical treatments, social stigmas discourage natural styles.^{1,2} An example of discrimination against Afro-ethnic hair in popular media occurred in 2015, when a fashion critic compared Black actress Zendaya's dreadlocks to the smell of marijuana. Discrimination against Afro-textured hair may lead Black women to seek chemical hair-straighteners more than women from other racial/ethnic groups, contributing to burden of hair and scalp dermatoses.² The dermatology community should be aware of these concerns, because our efforts may motivate Black female patients to seek dermatological care.

In recent years, mainstream media, such as Disney's 2020 film *Hair Love*, Issa Rae's *Insecure*, COVID-19-related Instagram hashtags like #quarantinecurls, and dermatology-related accounts like @Brownkinderm have increased visibility of Afro-textured hair. Although there is heightened awareness for natural hair, Black women report dissatisfaction with the degree of knowledge that physicians specializing in hair have about the complexity of Afro-textured hair.³ Dermatologists play an integral role in Black women's journey to disentangle social stigmas and clinically treat indications that impose barriers to maintaining natural hair styles.

The dermatology community has the unique opportunity to advocate for hair equity among

Black patients and dispel common misconceptions (e.g. increased clinical research, certified dermatologist-led Twitter accounts), following precedents set by experts in the field including Dr. Crystal Aguh. Medical schools and dermatology residency training programs may augment instruction on Afro-textured hair in their curricula. Dermatologists may partner up with Black hair stylists to conduct educational sessions for clients on haircare management, perhaps including medical students for dermatologist-supervised cultural competency training. Our increasingly diverse population requires that dermatologists adapt to the unique needs of Black patient and highlight the beauty of healthy, Afro-textured hair. Rather than perpetuating the damaging belief that Afro-textured hair is too different or difficult to manage, we should empower Black women to embrace their natural curls and acknowledge the diversity in all variations of Afro-textured hair.

Conflict of Interest Disclosures: None

Funding: None

Corresponding Author:

Danyal Tahseen
McGovern Medical School
University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston
6431 Fannin St
Houston, TX
Email: danyal.tahseen@uth.tmc.edu

References:

1. Tanus A, Oliveira CCC, Villarreal DJV, Sanchez FAV, Dias MFRG. Black women's hair: The main scalp dermatoses and aesthetic practices in women of African ethnicity. *An Bras Dermatol*. 2015;90(4):450-467. doi:10.1590/abd1806-4841.20152845
2. Zota AR, Shamasunder B. The Environmental Injustice of Beauty: Framing Chemical Exposures from Beauty Products as a Health Disparities Concern. *Am J Obs Gynecol*. 2017;217(4):139-148. doi:10.1016/j.physbeh.2017.03.040
3. Gathers RC, Mahan MG. African American women, hair care, and health barriers. *J Clin Aesthet Dermatol*. 2014;7(9):26-29.

September 2020 Volume 4 Issue 5