Hair Rules

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Recently, there's been a number of stories in the news about natural hair creating problems for those who wear their tresses this way. The latest concerns Vanessa Van Dyke, a 12-year-old African-American girl in Orlando, Florida, who was harassed by other students because of the way she wore her hair: in its naturally puffy, big, beautiful state. A strange thing happened, though. Instead of school officials taking issue with the bullying of this girl, they chose to cite the institution's handbook and hold her in contempt of its rules for how students could wear their hair. Their ruling? Conform or hit the concrete.

Stranger still was that nothing was said to the student's parents about her hair until the child's mother complained about the bullying. Is it my imagination, or is there a problem here?

As I mentioned at the beginning, an increasing number of these incidents have been reported within the past few months. Remember the 7-year-old girl from Tulsa, Oklahoma who was sent home for wearing her hair in dreadlocks? That was Tiana Parker. In her case, as with Van Dyke, the school board also reconsidered its rules and amended the one about acceptable hair styles for students.

For now, Van Dyke's parents chose to keep her enrolled in the same school. Parker's parents did not.

But schools aren't the only institutions to take such a negative view of natural African-American hair. Corporate America is another culprit. Many businesses have unwritten rules about how blacks should wear hair to work. I say unwritten because if it was written, there'd probably be hell to pay, especially when there's much lip service given to the importance of supporting diversity in the workplace.

Indeed, diversity means embracing differences. And when it comes to hair, the strands on our heads immediately register a difference. How ridiculous it is that this aspect of our diversity still triggers such ignorance and misunderstanding.

Black hair is the way it is.

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