

Straight or Curly?

Defending Our Freedom to Choose

Rebeca Espinosa

BEFORE YOU READ: What does it mean to “push back against a custom”? Have you ever pushed back against a custom or witnessed others doing it? Share your story.

A Movement for African-Latina Identity

Traditionally, in the Dominican Republic, women have gone to the beauty parlor to straighten their hair. We are told that natural curly hair is “bad,” so we go through the long and costly processes trying to straighten it. However, in recent years, women have started to push back against this custom. There is a movement of women who want to defend our natural beauty and rebel at the idea that we must be “perfect” according to white standards. This women’s movement affirms African-Latina identity.

End Discrimination

One accomplishment of this movement is that we have demanded an end to discrimination in the workplace and in schools. At work, women have argued that supervisors cannot request that they go to the beauty parlor. Women should be allowed to wear natural hair to work. And at school, teachers cannot complain that students with big hair are blocking other students from seeing the blackboard. Yes, everyone needs to see the blackboard, but teachers can find other solutions. The campaigns against discrimination have reached the media, and we are getting more attention.



“Miss Rizos” is a blog, part of an online movement, a series of events and gatherings, and now a hair salon in Santo Domingo – all started by Carolina Contreras. In Spanish, “pelo rizo” means curly hair, and Miss Rizos sells products designed for black women’s natural hair. What do you think “Yo amo mi pajón” means? Learn more at www.missrizos.com. Photo used with permission from: Joan Encarnación for La Galería Magazine <lajeriamag.com>, a magazine and online forum for Dominicans in the diaspora.



A New Type of Beauty Salon

Another accomplishment is that there are women entrepreneurs who have opened beauty salons especially for women with curly hair. This helps women feel more comfortable wearing their hair naturally. (See the photo of “Miss Rizos” and the caption on the previous page.)

More Women Joining the Movement

Every day, more Dominican women join this movement, and they have started to show off their natural hair. We do not criticize women who prefer to continue straightening their hair. But we defend women’s right to make their own decisions. It can be hard to break free from the customs you were raised with. For example, I have a friend who told me that ever since she was little, her mother took her to the beauty salon to straighten her hair. It wasn’t until she lived in Spain that she realized that she just had curly hair. At that moment she thought, “If God gave me this type of hair, why shouldn’t I keep it?”

Feeling Free to Choose

Whether it’s curly or straight, every woman deserves to feel good about herself. We deserve to feel confident and sure of ourselves. Stereotypes about what is beautiful should not get in the way.

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AFTER YOU READ:

1. According to the author, what are three things women have done to defend their freedom to choose straight or curly hair?
2. This is a classic five-paragraph essay. Choose a sentence in the introduction that you think is the thesis statement. Look at the three body paragraphs and underline the topic sentence. Which of the body paragraphs is strongest? Why?

Don’t Touch My Hair!

After fighting to be allowed to wear natural hair, many African Americans then struggle with white people wanting to touch their hair!



Momo Pixel created an online game in response to unwanted hair touching. Use the arrow keys to swat the hands away! Play it here: hairnah.com Read an interview with her: www.thecut.com/2017/11/hair-nah-game-momo-pixel-interview.html.



Look up the music video and the lyrics to, “Don’t Touch My Hair” by Solange.

Watch 4-year old Caidyn Bennett talk about what it’s like going out in public with his mom and having people comment about his hair and pet his head. His mom says, “Be polite.” What would you say? Read a story about it here: www.nydailynews.com/news/national/meet-tiny-internet-star-caidyn-bennett-don-touch-hair-article-1.3483036.

