Why So Much Ado About a Hairdo? Examining How the Hair Choices of Black Women Vary by Occupation

Katherine Karl
University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

Joy V. Peluchette
Lindenwood University

Gail Dawson
University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

To better understand negative stereotypes and biases against natural Black hairstyles (e.g., afros, braids, dreadlocks), this study examines the hair style choices of Black women working in four occupational groups (finance, medicine, law, and technology). Using literature on identity shifting, professional identity, and professional appearance norms, we predicted variation in the hairstyle choices of Black women employed in these four occupations. Results indicate Black women technology professionals were significantly more likely to wear natural hairstyles than any of the other three occupations. Black women lawyers were significantly less likely than either physicians or women in technology to wear natural hairstyles. As predicted, the more conservative and formal the work environment, the more likely Black woman adjust their hairstyle to mirror white standards of what is viewed as professional.

Keywords: black women, hairstyle, identity shifting, professional identity, appearance

INTRODUCTION

"Hey girl, am I more than my hair?", "I am not my hair", "Hair penalties", and "Hair matters" are just a few of the subtitles from the growing body of literature on the negative stereotypes associated with natural Black hairstyles and textures (Dawson, Karl, & Peluchette, 2019; Opie & Phillips, 2015; Patton, 2006; Randle, 2015), which begs the question, "why is there so much ado about hair?" Consider this, for a Black woman, a job interview involves not only getting directions to the interview site, leaving early enough to ensure she arrives 15 minutes early, making sure she has an extra updated resume, and reviewing the information on the company website, but also making sure to get her hair "done." "Done", in this case, means no afro, no cornrows, no braids, no twists and no dreadlocks, all of which have been found to be viewed as "unprofessional" by interviewers (Henson, 2017; Johnson, Godsil, MacFarlane, Tropp, & Goff, 2017; Koval & Rosette, 2020). Rather, "done" means she must alter her hair from its natural state by straightening it, adding a weave, pulling it back into a bun, or wearing a wig. It also means that she will often spend hundreds of dollars and several hours at a salon. In addition, she cannot exercise or expose her

hair to water of any kind, otherwise the time and money spent to alter her hair from its natural state will be for naught. While these are the concerns faced by many Black women in the workforce today, it does not stop at the interview. Once a Black woman is hired, she must choose between maintaining that look or risk future advancement opportunities, possibly even the loss of her job (Dawson et al., 2019).

The above scenario illustrates the challenge that Black women face in dealing with the bias they encounter if their hair is worn in its natural state (Maynard & Jules, 2020; Morgan, 2020; Omotoso, 2018; Oyedemi, 2016). While some states in the U.S. (California, New York, New Jersey, Virginia, Colorado, Washington, Maryland, Connecticut, New Mexico, Delaware, and Nebraska) prohibit discrimination based on hairstyle and texture, most employers can still legally prohibit Blacks from wearing braids, twists, plaits, cornrows, or dreadlocks (Brown, 2021). In addition to the lack of legal protection from discrimination, Black women have faced a history of dealing with negative stereotypes and biases associated with their hair. Many of these biases still exist and can be heightened when underrepresentation makes Black women feel more visible in their work environment. Norms of what is viewed as professional in many workplaces tend to be centered around a cultural framework of whiteness (Roberts, 2005; McCluney, Durkee, Smith Robotham & Lee, 2021), causing Black women to feel pressure to alter their hair to meet these expectations. The level of this pressure differs by occupation depending on the formality and strength of professional appearance norms (Rafaeli & Pratt, 1993) such that natural Black hairstyles would be viewed as a norm violation in work settings with strong appearance norms. According to Ray (2019), most workplace organizational structures produce hierarchies which have reinforced gender and racial inequalities. Whites and males tend to be concentrated at the top levels of these organizations and, although some minorities do reach these levels, their low numbers make them highly visible and subject to pressure to "fit in" (Wingfield & Alston, 2014; Yoshino, 2006). Evidence of such pressure to conform was found in a study of Black women in higher education where only 29 percent of those in top administrative positions (president or provost) wore natural hairstyles compared to 56 percent of faculty (Karl, Peluchette, & Dawson, in press). Likewise, Koval and Rosette (2020) found that Black women with natural hairstyles were viewed more negatively when applying for a job in consulting (an industry with strong appearance norms) as opposed to advertising.

The purpose of this study is to extend existing research by examining Black women's hair choices across four occupation groups: law, medicine, finance, and technology. Because hair has long been associated with identity, especially for Black women (Turner, 2015), we apply identity theory (Stryker & Burke, 2000; Swann & Bosson, 2010; Tajfel, 1981) to the hair alternation practices of women in work settings, specifically focusing on the concept of identity shifting (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Dickens & Chavez, 2018), professional identity (Ibarra, 1999; Pratt, Rockman, & Kaufmann, 2006) and role execution (Rafaeli & Pratt, 1993; Rafaeli, Dutton, Harquial, & Mackie-Lewis, 1997).

Identity and Identity Shifting

One's identity consists of three levels: personal identity (one's own unique traits, abilities, and interests), relational identity (how one views oneself in relation to other people while carrying out a particular role, e.g., supervisor-subordinate, mother-children) and social identity (one's knowledge that he or she is a member of a social group, or groups, as well as the value attached to that membership) (Ashforth et al., 2008; Ashmore et al., 2004). Hair is a key aspect of both the personal and social identity of Black women (Donahoo, 2019; Garrin & Marcketti, 2018; Mbilishaka, Clemons, Hudlin, Warner, & Jones, 2020), as illustrated in the following quote:

> I want to know my hair again, the way I knew it before I knew that my hair is me, before I
> lost the right to me, before I knew that the burden of beauty-or lack of it-for an entire race
> of people could be tied up with my hair and me. (Caldwell, 1999, p. 365).

It is important to provide an historical perspective to fully appreciate the significance of hair to Black women. Stereotypes regarding Black hair were created and reinforced during the time of slavery. As stated by Powell (2018), "to have Black hair, was to have slave hair" (p. 940). Blacks with lighter skin tones were

generally biracial and often had a hair texture that could be more easily shaped and styled, like that of white women. When slavery ended, altering one's hair to a more Eurocentric hair texture (smooth and straight) was a necessity to survive in the white-dominated American workforce. Although natural hair became widespread during the 1960s with the Civil Rights/Black Power movement and many Black women began wearing afros and braids, these natural hairstyles faded in popularity during the 1980s but are still associated with being radical or political (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003). The natural hair movement experienced a resurgence between 2000 and 2010 as a social movement to redefine the beauty standards for Black people, especially Black women, and was reinforced by pop culture and Black celebrities. Although many Black people were inspired to wear natural hairstyles, the main obstacle was the concern about whether this would be viewed as acceptable professional appearance (Jones, 2020).

Because individuals are members of several groups, they hold multiple identities simultaneously. Black women, being members of two marginalized groups, experience both racism and sexism and often feel hyper-visible due to their numerical scarcity (Dickens, Womack, & Dimes, 2019; McCluney & Rabelo, 2019). To lessen their distinctiveness, many Black women feel compelled to engage in identity shifting (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Dickens et al., 2019). This is defined as altering the way one presents oneself in response to perceived social demands (Gamst et al., 2020). Shifting may involve altering one's tone of voice, behavior, appearance, or even one's morals and values where the intent is to become more socially invisible and to neutralize the negative stereotypes or assumptions associated with being a Black woman (Dickens et al., 2019; McCluney & Rabelo, 2019). For example, in a qualitative study by Hall, Everett, and Hamilton-Mason (2012), one Black woman described her experience with identity shifting as follows:

> I feel like I live in two worlds. I can very much get along and do the whole thing when I have to, in certain settings, because unfortunately, we do have to but I'm clear about the fact that I have to play different roles. And I can do that. (p. 216).

Professional Identity and Identity Shifting

In the workplace, individuals also develop a professional identity which is how people define themselves in a professional role (Ibarra, 1999; Pratt et al., 2006). Professions develop appearance norms that serve to strengthen the identity of individuals as professionals and provide immediate recognition of the profession to others (Bazin & Aubert-Tarby, 2013). Research shows that appearance norms, which are viewed as appropriate and conform to organizational norms, facilitate role execution by making one's "work self" more salient and other roles less salient (Rafaeli et al., 1997). Compliance with appearance norms also affects an individual's psychological comfort, self-confidence, and ability to establish relationships with others – all of which are important in accomplishing one's work role (Rafaeli & Pratt, 1993; Rafaeli et al., 1997).

However, the challenge for Black women is that what is commonly considered to be professional is culturally biased and, according to Roberts (2005), associated with being white/Anglo, male, heterosexual, middle class, and well educated. It is also intertwined with traditional perceptions of beauty, femininity, and desirability (Jones, 2020; Melaku, 2019; Yoshino, 2006). Because most professional work environments are predominantly white, it is argued that conventional perceptions of appearance are assessed through a white or Eurocentric racial framework that values lighter skin, straighter hair texture, smaller facial features, and thinner body frames, making it difficult for visibly Black women to meet these standards (Cumberbatch, 2021). A growing body of literature provides evidence that Black hairstyles and textures are often associated with negative stereotypes and biases regarding professionalism and competency (Dawson et al., 2019; Donahoo & Smith, 2019; Ellis-Hervey, Doss, Davis, Nicks, & Azaiza, 2016; Johnson et al., 2017; Mbilishaka et al., 2020; Opie & Phillips, 2015; Randle, 2015). Even Google's algorithm has been found to be biased against natural Black hairstyles, with a search for "unprofessional styles for work" resulting in many images of Black women with natural hairstyles and a search of "professional hairstyles for work" resulting in images of mostly white women (Sini, 2016).

Recent research also demonstrates that Black women with natural hair are less likely, than those with straightened hair, to be recommended for a job interview (Koval & Rosette, 2020). Thus, identity shifting is particularly relevant to the hair alteration practices of Black women in the workplace since it occurs because of perceived social demands (Donahoo & Smith, 2019; Henson, 2017; Moss, 2018). Studies show that people engage in identity shifting to minimize the effects of damaging identities (Berger, 2009; Button, 2004). Additional research demonstrates that Black women report greater social acceptance, confidence, self-esteem, and personal success if their hair and skin tone resemble that of white women (Robinson-Moore, 2008).

While professional appearance norms ensure homogeneity of appearance in the workplace, previous research suggests that there is considerable variation in the strength of these norms (Rafaeli & Pratt, 1993). Some industries and occupational groups are more relaxed allowing for individual differences, while others have much stronger norms and tolerate less deviation from those expectations. Appearance norms for various professions include expectations not only for one's dress but also for one's hair. For example, Koval and Rosette (2020) found that Black women with natural hairstyles received more negative evaluations in terms of professionalism and competence when applying for a job in consulting, an industry with strong dress norms, as opposed to advertising. Thus, perceived (or real) acceptance of natural styles is likely to depend on one's visibility, or the number of Black women in one's work environment, as well as the strength and formality of one's profession and/or organizational appearance norms. When Black women face hypervisibility and strong appearance norms, they are more likely to engage in identity shifting and such shifting is likely to include hair alteration (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003). The following section describes appearance norms for each of the four occupational groups and how these would impact their hairstyle choices.

Hair Choices by Occupational Group

Our selection of these occupations groups was based on underrepresentation of Black women across all four groups and thus, their hypervisibility. The following statistics are provided as evidence. For example, Black female lawyers are one of the most underrepresented groups in the law profession, making up only 1.73 percent of all attorneys (Melaku, 2019) and about 2 percent of equity partners in large law firms. For medicine, according to a report by the Association of American Medical Colleges (Diversity in Medicine: Fact and Figures 2019), Blacks make up approximately 5 percent of all physicians in the U.S. and just 2.6 percent are Black women. In finance, women make up only 23 percent of all CFP professionals but Blacks and Latinos account for less than 4 percent, even though they account for nearly 30 percent of the U.S. population (Paikert, 2020). Similar problems with underrepresentation of women and minorities exist in the technology, or what is commonly referred to as the 'high-tech' industry, with only 26 percent of computing jobs being held by women and Black women accounting for 3 percent of that number (White, 2020).

Law

Because of their underrepresentation, Black female lawyers experience both racism and sexism, reporting that they are often mistaken for being clients or clerks, instead of lawyers. For example, in her book *You Don't Look Like a Lawyer*, Mekalu (2019) reported that one Black female lawyer in an elite law firm recalled being immaculately dressed in a tailored business suit, discussing business in the hallway with colleagues after hours, and being stopped by a white male associate and asked to make copies. Other research shows that female Black attorneys also complain that, regardless of their credentials and previous success, they constantly have their credibility, competence, and authority challenged (Brown, 2014), are viewed as less capable of intellectual pursuits and overly scrutinized (Dickens et al., 2019), and are often viewed as aggressive, argumentative, or angry (Pratt, 2012; Weiss, 2020).

In terms of appearance, there has been a long tradition of formality with guidelines for women about hosiery, clothing, makeup, and hairstyles in the legal profession. According to Cumberbatch (2021), conventional standards of how attorneys should present themselves tend to be "more conservative, more exacting, more expensive, and more consequential than in most other industries, yet not more equitable nor

clear" (p. 87). In doing their work, attorneys are not only dealing with the perceptions of clients and other legal staff within the firm, but judges and other officers of the court. Aware of the negative stereotypes ascribed to them based on their bodies and hair, Black female lawyers tend to manage their professional identity to avoid confirming negative stereotypes and having their appearance and actions viewed through the lens of a stereotype based on their gendered racial identity (Caldwell, 1991; Cumberbatch, 2021; Pratt, 2012). According to Mekalu (2019), fashioning one's hair and dress is how Black women are forced to pay an inclusion tax to fit into the existing cultural frame of elite white men in corporate law firms. Altering the texture and length of hair, in some ways, becomes a proxy for legitimacy and serves to make others less uncomfortable with their natural hair.

Medicine

Several studies of physicians and medical students have found evidence of both sexism and racism in the medical profession (Jagsi, et al., 2016; Pololi & Jones, 2010). Recent studies show that women and underrepresented minorities who are physicians regularly experience microaggressions, ranging from verbal assaults to more subtle insults or invalidations, from both fellow staff and patients (de Bourmont et al., 2020; Torres, Salles, & Chochran, 2019). In addition, from the start of medical school, Torres et al. (2019) argue that women and underrepresented minorities experience verbal and nonverbal reminders of how they are different from the traditional image of the White male physician.

As with lawyers, people have a preconceived notion of what a physician should look like (e.g., white, male) and question the competency of someone who does not fit that mold, as was experienced by the Black female physician who attempted to assist a sick passenger on a Delta flight and received pushback from the flight staff onboard who indicated that they were looking for an "actual physician" (Hauser, 2016). Because positive patient-physician relationships are based on mutual trust and respect, studies have examined how physician appearance and attire impact patient perceptions of physician competence and expertise. For example, Petrilli et al. (2015) did a review of this literature and found that formal attire and white coats were preferred in 60 percent of the studies. In another study of Black physicians in residency programs, Black female residents indicated that they were often mistaken for nurses and to compensate for this, many took extra care to be identified as physicians by wearing white coats, displaying their name tag, and introducing themselves as "Dr. X" (Liebshcutz & Bharel, 2006).

There appears to be considerable pressure within the field of medicine to conform to professionalism norms. In their study of perceptions of professionalism of those working in a large university-based health system, Alexis et al. (2020) found that those from marginalized populations reported greater infringements on their professional boundaries, scrutiny over their professional actions, and pressure to conform to the dominant norms of their work environment or their positions would be at stake. This is echoed by Torres et al. (2019) who indicate that Black physicians are discouraged from wearing their natural hair style. Black female physicians describe the issue of how to wear their hair as a challenge. For example, Dr. Adaira Landry, a Black female emergency medicine physician, recalls feeling discomfort when she heard a white physician ask a Black female trainee to cover her dreadlocks, saying that "it wasn't a professional look." The remark made her self-conscious about her own hair (Goldberg, 2020). Similarly, Faith Crittenden, a black female medical student who serves as a mentor for pre-medical students, indicated that she struggles with how to advise female medical students of color on how to style their hair when preparing for their residency interviews, always feeling unable to provide a comforting answer as to whether there is a "safe" hairstyle for them to wear (Crittenden, 2019).

Finance

Several articles in both the academic literature (Bielby, 2012; Dreizler, 2020; Hibbler-Britt, 2016; von Hippel, Sekaquatewa, & McFarlane, 2015) and popular press (e.g., Abelson et al., 2020; Diaz et al., 2020) portray a workplace culture of systemic sexism and racism in the finance industry that continues to be perpetuated. As one Black female financial adviser indicated "It feels like our industry measures who we are as minority and women advisers based on standards set by white men" (Harris, 2019). Bates and

Woodman (2018) indicate that the finance industry is dominated by white males and that few Black women are considered for positions in the 'front office' of financial institutions where the revenue is generated.

Because of the finance industry's origination in large city centers (e.g., Wall Street), it has long been associated with a high level of formality in appearance norms (Easterling, Leslie, & Jones, 1992). As stated by a participant in a qualitative study by Bazin and Auber-Tarby (2013), "In investment banking, we tend to be more formal because we meet client[s] a lot and we don't want to give them the wrong impression" (p. 262). Likewise, a human resources manager at PricewaterhouseCoopers stated that appropriate appearance "reflects good judgement and clients feel someone who has good judgement will give good advice" (Biecher, Keaton, & Pollman, 1999, p. 18). However, recent evidence indicates that professions in finance are now more varied and that the industry is starting to relax its standards on appearance. For example, banks and investment firms like J.P. Morgan and Goldman Sachs are competing with tech firms for recent graduates and, therefore, relaxing their appearance norms to look more modern and appealing (Wall Street's New Dress Code Raises Question: What to Wear? 2019). Financial services have expanded beyond banking to private equity, venture capital, and hedge funds, each with different cultures and styles in appearance expectations (Patterson, 2019). Given the white-dominated and sexist industry work culture, it is likely that Black females would conform to the more traditional formal appearance standards, even though the standards appear to be evolving.

Technology

Although the lack of representation and mobility of women in the tech industry is a problem (Petrucci, 2020; Thomas, Joseph, Williams, Crum, & Burge, 2018), much of what is written about the industry focuses on its racist culture. Because of the overrepresentation of whites across all positions in the industry, Reitman (2006) interviewed thirty Black, white, and Asian professional males about their experience in the tech workplace. She found that racialization of the workplace existed through a process of 'whitewashing' which simultaneously denies race while superimposing a white culture. This was evident in the avoidance of race in everyday language, the masking of racial visibility by ignoring racial identities, and promotion of the concept of 'global village' multiculturalism which placed value on those from Asian and European countries but excluded underrepresented minorities (Blacks and Latinos). At the same time, there was the imposition of a white work culture which emphasized informality in appearance and those who were identified by participants as adhering to informal dress norms were always white. Black employees who engaged in similar levels of informality in hairstyles and clothing were often marginalized from the white culture as not belonging (Reitman, 2006). Recent research by Daniels (2015) indicates that racism continues to be an issue in the tech industry, making it difficult for Blacks to be hired and/or promoted. Similarly, narratives from eleven Black females working in computing revealed that they experienced discrimination, expectations that are too high or too low, isolation, sexism, and racism, yet they still chose to stay in the field because of their personal and professional goals (Thomas et al., 2018).

While the appearance norms for the tech industry are the most informal of all four occupational groups, one would assume that there would be less formality in hairstyles, giving Black women the freedom to wear their hair in a natural style. While this may be so, they still express concern about acceptance in the workplace. For example, one Black woman argues that the tech workplace culture needs to change so that employees "are more comfortable with our hair, names, and accent…" (Brown, 2016, para. 12). Similarly, two other Black women state that "while many tech companies advertise a relaxed appearance standard as a perk of the job, Black women still often receive unwanted attention for things like choosing to change up their hairstyles" (Xu, 2020, p. 11).

Hypotheses

While the hypervisibility of Black women is similar across the four occupational groups discussed above, the appearance norms for each vary, thus we expect differences in hairstyle choices. Because the appearance norms in technology are the most informal of all four of the occupations, we expect that Black women in technology professions will be more likely to wear natural hairstyles than those in the other three occupations. In addition, the comments that we found from some Black women in the tech industry

indicated that, although they did not appreciate comments made by co-workers about their hair, they were wearing natural hairstyles. However, this did not seem to be the case with the law profession in which the appearance norms for attorneys are very formal, especially for women. Of all four of the occupations, we found the most evidence in the literature that Black women lawyers feel pressured to alter their hair to conform to appearance expectations. Thus, we proposed the following:

Hypothesis 1: *Black women in technology professions will be more likely to wear natural hairstyles than those in finance, law, or medicine.*

Hypothesis 2: *Black women lawyers will be less likely to wear natural hairstyles than those in finance, medicine, or technology professions.*

METHOD

Like the methodology used in previous research (Dawson & Karl, 2018), we collected our sample from photos of Black women posted on the internet. The photos of the lawyers, physicians and technology-related professionals were obtained from three different lists: (1) Savoy's 2018 Most Influential Black Lawyers (http://savoynetwork.com/mibl2018/), (2) 200 Black Women in Tech to Follow on Twitter (https://medium.com/hackernoon/200-black-women-in-tech-to-follow-on-twitter-e33a27303b4a), and (3) Black Women Physicians (https://drcindyduke.com/black-women-physicians/). The list of lawyers, which was obtained from *Savoy Magazine*, included photos of both men and women. After eliminating the men, 87 Black female lawyers remained. The physician list yielded a total of 87 female Black physicians. For the Black women in Tech list, only those women who included a technology-related occupation in their bio were included in the sample (e.g., some of those discarded were described as tech bloggers or being members of Black women in STEM groups). Those without photos were also discarded. This resulted in a total of 92 Black women in technology.

The photos of finance professionals were obtained from five lists (1) 8 Black Women Making Waves In The Venture Capital World (https://afrotech.com/these-black-women-are-making-waves-in-the-venture-capital-world), (2) 75 Most Powerful Blacks on Wall Street (just the women were used, N=13; https://www.blackenterprise.com/75-most-powerful-blacks-on-wall-street-2/), (3) *Savoy*'s Most Influential Blacks in Corporate America (just those in finance positions were included, N=8; http://savoynetwork.com/mibeca2020/), and (4) a search of LinkedIn using CFP, financial advisor and wealth management as search terms (N=34; www.linkedin.com), and (5) the Association of African American Financial Advisors Fifty under 50 (just the women were included, N=22; https://www.aaafainc.com/50-under-50). The combined list included 85 Black women in finance. Next, the authors independently coded the hair of the women in the 351 photos as being Eurocentric (code = 0) or Afrocentric (code = 1) in hairstyle. There was 100% agreement between the three authors.

Results

A total of 137 (39%) in our sample chose natural hairstyles which is slightly less than the 46.9 percent reported by Karl et al. (in press) in a sample of Black women in academia. However, as predicted, there was considerable variation across occupations. Women in technology-related occupations were most likely to wear natural hairstyles (62%), followed by physicians (44.8%), finance professionals (32.9%) and lawyers (14.9%). The results of a Chi-square analysis showed the difference was significant [χ^2 (3, N=351) = 44.09, p <.000]. The results of a mean comparison using ANOVA was also significant [F (3, 347) = 16.62, p <.000]. A comparison of means using a Bonferonni correction revealed that lawyers were significantly less likely than either physicians or women in technology to wear natural hairstyles. Finance professionals were significantly less likely than women in technology to wear natural hairstyles. The difference between finance professionals and lawyers was not significant nor was the difference between finance professionals and physicians.

DISCUSSION

Black women, who are grossly underrepresented in the fields of law, medicine, finance and technology, face hypervisibility and pressure to conform to appearance standards that are based on a culture of whiteness (Nkomo & Aris, 2014; Roberts, 2005). Consequently, the hair choices of Black women in these occupations tend to reflect the white majority, that is, hairstyles that are straighter and smoother than natural Black hairstyles. In support, less than half of the women we sampled in these occupations chose to wear natural hairstyles. As predicted, Black women lawyers were significantly less likely than either physicians or women in technology to wear natural hairstyles while Black women technology professionals were significantly more likely to wear natural hairstyles than any of the other three occupations. These findings are consistent with the professional appearance norms that exist in these industries. The more conservative and formal the work environment, the more pressure is put on Black women to conform to stereotypes of what is viewed as professional.

Practical Implications

To create a more inclusive work environment and one in which natural hairstyles are deemed professional, companies need to address both the hypervisibility of Black women in these occupations and the nature of the existing appearance norms. Thus, our first recommendation is that companies increase their efforts to attract and retain Black women in these occupations. Second, organizational leaders must play an active role in fostering a culture in which Black women feel valued and welcome as they are. More specifically, companies should revise their policies to ensure they are inclusive and accepting of all hair types. Third, changes in policy should also be accompanied by changes in the content of diversity training. It is possible that natural hair styles, such as cornrows, braids, twists, and dreadlocks, would gain greater acceptance, consciously and subconsciously, if individuals understood the cost and health risks of hair-straightening treatments. In addition, recent events (the murder of George Floyd and others) and the Black Lives Matter movement have highlighted the need for workplace diversity training to go beyond merely discussing racism to focus instead on anti-blackness (Bell, 2020; Roberson, 2020). For example, diversity training should focus on overt and implicit biases and how common stereotypes about natural Black hairstyles (unprofessional or unkempt) negatively impact the work lives of Black employees.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The data used in this study was based on a convenience sample drawn from online sources. In three of the occupational groups (e.g., law, finance, technology), the sources focused on Black women who were at the top of their profession. Thus, it is possible that the sample is not an accurate representation of all Black women in these fields. In addition, no information was available on the age of the women or the number of years of experience they had in their profession. Future research examining a larger more varied sample, while controlling for age and experience, would allow for a better test of the impact of occupational group on hairstyle choices.

Another limitation is that the data was based on the hairstyle choice of Black women professionals at one point in time. While the choice made for a professional photo is evidence that Black women feel pressure to conform to Eurocentric hairstyles, it is possible that their hairstyle choice for the photo is not representative of the way they wear their hair most of the time. Future research examining the frequency with which Black women wear straightened hairstyles and when and why they choose to wear those hairstyles is needed. Further, now that some states have passed legislation prohibiting discrimination based on hairstyle and texture, future research should examine whether such legislation is impacting the biases and stereotypes and lessening the pressure that Black women feel to alter their natural hair.

Future studies should also examine the consequences to Black women and organizations of natural hair bias. Research shows that identity shifting can have significant negative consequences for individuals. For example, studies have found that it can lead to critical self-judgment, cause considerable stress, and jeopardize the physical and emotional well-being of Black women (Gamst et al., 2020). Shifting has also been associated with hair loss, sleep deprivation, emotional eating, compulsive shopping, substance abuse,

anxiety, depression, and severe cases of hypertension (Hall et al., 2012; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003). In addition, altering natural hair comes at a considerable cost in terms of time, money, and health, including permanent damage to hair follicles and chemical burns (Dawson & Karl, 2018). It is likely these adverse consequences lead to lower organizational commitment and higher turnover.

CONCLUSION

This study extends past research by demonstrating that Eurocentric preferences, biases, and stereotypes about what is viewed as professional, and what is not, are impacting the hairstyle choices of women in finance, law, medicine, and technology. Newly passed legislation in the U.S. suggests that standards for professional hair may be changing. Perhaps one day there will be no reason to ask, "Why so much ado about a hairdo?"

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