My Natural Hair Is Unprofessional: The Impact of Black Hairstyles on Perceived Employment-Related Characteristics

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ABSTRACT
MY NATURAL HAIR IS UNPROFESSIONAL: THE IMPACT OF BLACK HAIRSTYLES
ON PERCEIVED EMPLOYMENT-RELATED CHARACTERISITICS

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The media has multiple examples of Black women experiencing negative outcomes at the hands of their potential employers and the employers' biases against particular hairstyles. Research has demonstrated that several within-race variables such as skin tone and Afrocentric facial features influence how Black individuals are treated across a number of contexts. The present study investigated hairstyle as a potential within-racial variable that effects Black women negatively in the employment context. Utilizing the Princeton trilogy methodology, researchers empirically documented the stereotypes associated with Black hairstyles (i.e., afros, dreadlocs, straightened hair). Participants were instructed to generate traits they were aware of that are associated with each hairstyle. Straightened hair was uniquely associated with *clean*, *professional*, *feminine*, and *pretty*. Afro was uniquely associated with *wild*, *radical*, and *solidarity*. The dreadlock hairstyle was uniquely associated with *drug use*, *ghetto*, *nasty*, and *gross*. These findings suggest the existence of unique stereotypical content for each of the hairstyles.

Researchers then explored whether associations made with these hairstyles would impact the perceived employability of Black female job applicants. Participants viewed one of three LinkedIn profiles for a Black female applicant, which were identical except for the hairstyle she wore in the profile image, and rated the applicant on employment characteristics, hair-specific traits, hirability, and starting salary. Researchers failed to support their hypotheses. There were no significant differences on employment characteristics, hair-specific traits, hirability, and starting salary across hair style conditions. Further, employment characteristics, hair-specific traits, and hirability were all rated consistently high for the mock-applicant regardless of hairstyle. Researchers propose the applicants compelling qualifications may not have allowed for ambiguity in the hiring process, where racial bias is more commonly witnessed.

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related characteristics

Introduction

> "After having my son, I asked my news director if I could stop straightening my hair. A month after giving me the green light I was pulled back into his office. I was told 'My natural hair is unprofessional and the equivalent to him [of] throwing on a baseball cap to go to the grocery store…' I admit I am tired of changing my voice and wearing a wig in order to report on TV."
>
> Brittany Noble (2018) – Former News Anchor at Nexstars WJTV (Jackson, MS)

"If your hair is relaxed, White people are relaxed. If your hair is nappy, they're not happy.
– Comedian Paul Mooney

Perceived professionalism is an emerging construct relevant to research conducted within the work context, particularly as it applies to job applicants and new workers. In the business sector, many companies are becoming more tolerant of various dress styles and body modifications (Broadbridge & Fielden, 2018); however, individuals with marginalized identities may still be concerned about the degree to which their often-underrepresented identities are accepted at work (Roberts, 2005). In 2019, the New York City Commission on Human Rights updated its guidelines to prevent discrimination of Black people based on their hairstyle. According to the guideline, Black people are allowed to maintain "natural hair, treated or untreated hairstyles such as locs, cornrows, twists, braids, Bantu knots, fades, Afros, and/or the right to keep hair in an uncut or untrimmed state" (Stowe, 2019). This guideline will likely benefit Black employees

throughout New York City; however, its implementation in New York highlights a significant problem still faced by Black people across the United States.

Negative attributes associated with Black individuals' hair[1] can be traced back to the transatlantic slave trade. For example, historic publications by White travelers, newspaper articles, runaway slave advertisements, and notes of early American artists include comments about the odd growth and styling of what they refer to as Black people's "wool" (White & White, 1995). The kinky, curly hair texture of Black people was considered to be one indication of their foreign nature, which engendered an essentialist view of Black otherness and inferiority, thus justifying the inhumane treatment inflicted upon Black people.

Although slavery in the United States ended in 1865, anti-Black stereotypes associated with Black people's hair have persisted. Contemporarily, Black individuals' hair is still negatively stereotyped, and research in the fields of sociology and African American studies suggest certain Black hairstyles (e.g., dreadlocs, braids, afros) can influence how Black people are perceived (Byrd & Tharps, 2001; Caldwell, 1991; Jenkins, 2018). As the opening quotes illustrate, when Black women wear their hair in natural (i.e., not chemically straightened or manipulated) hairstyles – such as dreadlocs, afros, or braids – they are often viewed as unprofessional, aggressive, militant, incompetent, criminal, or unattractive. Sociological work has demonstrated that Black women are conscious of the critical lens through which their hair is viewed by society at large and some women consequently exert significant effort to avoid being perceived negatively because of their hairstyle (Bellinger, 2007). This may involve Black women

[1] Individuals of African descent typically have hair that is thick, tightly coiled, and naturally drier

spending hours preparing their hair for work, spending entire days in the beauty salon, spending large amounts of money on hair supplies, avoiding physical activity, or avoiding going outdoors when it is raining.

Although legal publications have documented many cases of employment discrimination experienced by Black women based on the way they wear their hair (Onwuachi-Willig, 2010), empirical investigations of the influence of Black hair styles on evaluations of Black women in the labor domain are scarce. Negative assessments of Black individuals' hair may lead to assumptions that Black people are lazy, ignorant, unkempt, unpredictable, or unprofessional. Thus, the aim of the present study is to empirically examine the influence of different Black hair styles on the evaluation of Black women's employment-related characteristics and outcomes.

There are countless examples of Black people from whom job offers were rescinded because of their hairstyle. In 2016, the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in the case of EEOC v. Catastrophe Management Solutions, allowing the employer to ban dreadlocs during the hiring process and to rescind job offers based on hairstyle (Greene, 2017). Considering how well documented the effects negative associations with Black hair have on outcomes for Black people, empirical accounts of this phenomenon are scarce in psychology.

Hairstyle as a Within-Race Variable

Research has demonstrated that several within-race variables such as skin tone and Afrocentric facial features influence how Black individuals are treated across a number of context (Maddox, 2004). For example, Eberhardt, Davies, Purdie-Vaughns, and Johnson (2006) found that in cases where the victim of a violent crime was White,

male defendants with more stereotypically Black facial features (i.e., broad nose, full lips, dark skin) were more likely to be sentenced to death. Moreover, Viglione, Hannon, and DeFina (2010) found that Black women with darker skin tones were sentenced more harshly and served more of their sentenced time relative to Black women with lighter skin tones. Research also suggests that lighter skinned Black people, relative to their darker skin counterparts, are paid higher salaries (Allen et al., 2000; Goldsmith, Hamilton, & Darity, 2006, 2007; Keith & Herring, 1991; Mason, 2004), have lower rates of unemployment, and obtain higher occupational prestige (Espino & Franz, 2002; Hill, 2000). This body of work demonstrates that although any Black individual may face racial discrimination, some Black individuals are more susceptible to discrimination than others due to within-race differences.

Although hairstyle has been theorized as a within-race characteristic that influences perception of Black people (Ellis-Hervey et al., 2016; Maddox, 2004; Patton, 2006), few empirical investigations have explored how commonly worn Black hairstyles may influence how Black individuals are evaluated and treated. In fact, to the researcher's knowledge, only a handful of studies to date have empirically explored this phenomenon with Black targets.

The "Good Hair" study (McGill et al., 2017) explored explicit as well as implicit attitudes about hairstyles commonly worn by Black women. Using a national sample of 4,163 women and men, researchers explicitly inquired about participants' opinions regarding textured hair – hairstyles that exhibits a prototypically Black hair texture – and smooth hair. McGill and colleagues found that Black women's textured hair is perceived to be less beautiful, sexy, attractive, and professional than smooth hair. White women

perceive afros as significantly less beautiful, sexy, attractive, and professional than Black women. Black women perceive their textured hair as stigmatized, and this perception is supported by their finding that White women display explicit bias against Black women's textured hair. Further, White women perceive the US to consider afros significantly less beautiful, sexy, and attractive; however, both Black and White women believe that afros are considered in the US to be unprofessional. This finding suggests a common understanding across races of the inherent bias in the US conceptualization of professionalism. Additionally, Black women indicate that if they are wearing a textured hairstyle, they are most likely to wear braids or afros. This would suggest that after straightened styles, braids and afros could be the hairstyles worn most commonly by Black women in stringent professional settings.

McGill and colleagues (2017) also created the first implicit associations test to assess attitudes toward Black women's hair, the Hair Implicit Association Test (Hair IAT). Researchers found that regardless of race, participants on average showed a moderate level of implicit bias against textured hair. White men and women showed stronger levels of implicit bias against textured hair. These findings would suggest an overall negative perception of all Black hairstyles that exhibits a prototypically Black hair texture; however, the design of the Hair IAT categorized the eight hairstyles as either textured (afro, dreadlocs, twist- out, braids) or smooth (straight, long curls, short curls, and pixie cut). This dichotomization does not allow for quantitative assessment of individual differences in the implicit associations of different textured styles. Therefore, the differences in implicit perceptions of different textured hairstyles cannot replicate the varied explicit perceptions reported in McGill and colleagues qualitative survey.

Prior to the "Good Hair" study, Opie and Phillips (2015) had empirically explored the perceptions of different hairstyles worn by Black women. They investigated whether hairstyles worn by Black women – either Afrocentric (i.e., afros and dreadlocs) or Eurocentric (i.e., straightened, falling past their shoulders) – impact perceptions of Black women's professionalism and dominance across three studies. In study 1, they presented participants with a headshot of a White woman with straight hair, a Black woman with straightened hair, a Black woman with dreadlocs, or a Black woman with an afro. Participants were then asked how professional the woman in the headshot was and how likely the target was to succeed in corporate America. Researchers found that the images of the Black and White woman with straight hair were perceived as more professional than the images of the Black woman with an afro and the Black woman with dreadlocs.

Building on the results of Study 1, Study 2 was designed to examine how the manipulation of hairstyle impacts perceived professionalism, the potential mediation by dominance, as well as the potential moderation by participant race. In this study, professionalism was measured using questions created to reflect the lack-of-fit model (Heilman, 1983, 2001). The lack-of-fit model suggests that individuals are penalized for not aligning with common associations made with a particular role, regardless of whether those associations are actual qualifications that would benefit a person's functioning in said role. For example, men are often associated with leadership roles; therefore, women may be particularly scrutinized for their gender when they hold a position of leadership. Researchers found that both Black and White participants perceived the woman wearing Afrocentric hairstyles more negatively than when she was wearing her hair straight; however, Black participants rated the woman significantly more negatively than White

participants. Furthermore, Black participants, but not Whites, perceived women with Afrocentric hairstyles as more dominant than those wearing Eurocentric hairstyles. The perceived dominance of the employment candidate also mediated the relationship between Afrocentric hairstyle and professionalism ratings by Black participants; candidates with Afrocentric hairstyles were perceived as more dominant and then rated lower on professionalism. Using the same stimuli and procedure as Study 2, with the same outcome measures from Study 1, Opie and Phillip's Study 3 sought to investigate the robustness of participant race as a moderator in the relationship between hairstyle and perceived professionalism among White and Black female participants. They found that a Black woman wearing Afrocentric hairstyles was perceived to be less professional and less likely to succeed in a corporate position, by White and Black participants; however, they found that the effect was even stronger for Black participants.

The findings of Opie and Phillips (2015) suggest that ratings of professionalism can significant vary for Black female job applicants based on their hairstyle as well as the evaluator. Black women with Afrocentric hairstyles can be perceived as less professional than Black women with Eurocentric hairstyles under certain contexts. Attribution of dominance could provide some explanation for this differential perception; however, the race of the evaluator plays a significant role in the evaluation of professionalism and the attribution of dominance to Black women who wear their hair in afro and dreadloc styles.

One limitation of Opie and Phillips (2015) studies, however, was the collapsing of two hairstyle conditions (i.e., afro and dreadlocs) into a single condition (i.e., Afrocentric), when research suggest there may be stereotypes associated with afros that differ from the stereotypes associated with dreadlocs. Both hairstyles are considered

Afrocentric because neither hairstyle requires manipulation of prototypically Black hair texture. Though this grouping is reasonable in terms of textural associations, this approach assumes that afros and dreadlocs are perceived similarly when historical evidence would suggest otherwise. For example, the "Black is beautiful" movement of the 70's was reified in the large afros worn by Black people; afros have been interpreted through a politicized lens in a way that other Black hairstyles have not (Lemi & Brown, 2019). In fact, Opie and Phillips' findings suggest significant differences between the perceptions of afros and dreadlocs, as well as potential qualitative differences between the two Black hairstyles. The researchers found that individuals perceived a Black woman with an afro to be significantly less professional and marginally less dominant than the same Black woman wearing dreadlocs. Although researchers did not provide an explanation for these findings, the findings suggest that Black women with afros were perceived differently than Black women with dreadlocs. No existing research has investigated the associations made with distinct Black hairstyles. Considering that afros and dreadlocs are rated differently on a trait association measure of dominance, one could reason that other Black hairstyles (e.g., afros, dreadlocs, cornrows, or straightened/relaxed hair) might vary on character traits as well. These findings highlight the need for further documentation of associations of Black hairstyles prior to investigating the particular bias expressed toward Black women in the hiring process.

Pilot Study

The pilot study aimed to empirically document stereotypes for various hairstyles worn by Black women. In order to determine whether there were unique characteristics associated with Black hairstyles, a modified version of the Princeton trilogy studies (Katz

and Braley, 1933; Gilbert, 1951; Karlins et al., 1969) was conducted. Participants were presented with images of Black men and women with various hairstyles: afros, dreadlocs, cornrows, fades, box braids, straightened/relaxed hair, and a voluminous natural style (Appendix A). Certain hairstyles are gendered – such that they are more commonly worn by women than men – so only images of women were presented for those hairstyles (i.e., box braids, straightened/relaxed hair, and voluminous natural style).

A content generation approach was selected because associations for Black hairstyles have yet to be documented empirically. Empirical documentation is a necessary step to ground any further research investigating associations with Black hairstyles. Additionally, hair style cannot easily be measured on a dimension from least to most prototypical of Black people, as other within-racial variables have previously been researched (i.e., skin-tone or nose width). Therefore, scalar or matrix measurements could only be used for exploratory research. Informed by the qualitative and anecdotal evidence that suggests Black hairstyles may have unique associations beyond those of the umbrella racial group, researchers formed the following hypothesis:

> H1: There would be unique stereotypes or character traits associated with different hairstyles worn by Black women. Specifically, when presented with images of different Black hairstyles and no additional information, multiple participants would freely associate the same unique traits with each of the Black hairstyles. For example, more than two participants may freely associate “radical” or a close synonym with images of afros.

Method

Participants. Ninety-two American citizens (M_{Age} = 38.37; SD_{Age} = 12.24) were recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) to complete the pilot study. The majority of the participants (64.79%) identified as female. Of the presented racial and

ethnic groups, participants identified with the following: White/European American (*n* = 55), Black/African American (*n* = 10), Latino/Hispanic (*n* = 7), and Middle Eastern (*n* = 1). The sample size was estimated in accordance with the original Princeton trilogy studies, (Katz and Braley, 1933; Gilbert, 1951; Karlins et al., 1969).

Procedure. Participants were directed to an online Qualtrics profile where a consent form was presented that verified their age and the appropriate means of compensation for participation. The participants were told the purpose of the study was to understand people's knowledge of stereotypes and associations related to certain hairstyles. Once the participant had consented, they were presented with six images of hairstyles – one at a time – and instructed to list as many traits (positive or negative) they were aware of that are associated with the Black hairstyles (e.g., afros, dreadlocs, cornrows, fades, box braids, straightened/relaxed hair, or a voluminous natural style). All of the images were captured from a rear angle to include the majority of the hairstyle without including any of the model's face. After the participants had completed the task, the experiment concluded and participants were thanked for their participation, debriefed, and compensated.

Results

The Princeton Trilogy method of trait analysis was utilized to determine the traits most frequently associated with Black hairstyles. Each response associated with a hairstyle was compiled before the screening process began. Any response directed at the hair in particular, as opposed to the person wearing the hairstyle, was deleted (e.g., "easy to maintain," "takes a lot of time," "long"). All words that specifically indicated a racial group, ethnicity, nationality, or inferred continental connections were deleted. Finally,

words that were only used once were removed unless they were a dictionary synonym of a trait that was used more than once. Subsequently, that word was changed to match the more frequently used synonym. Finally, the frequency for each trait was tabulated; this was done for each hairstyle.

All traits associated with each hairstyle can be found in Tables 1 – 3. Additionally, word clouds were created to graphically represented the weighted traits associated with each hairstyle (Appendix A – H). Regarding the hairstyles that were utilized in Proposed Study 1, the traits associated with afros which were endorsed more than twice were: Natural (*n* = 22), Wild (*n* = 16), Retro (*n* = 14), Unkempt (*n* = 12), Dirty (*n* = 7), Messy (*n* = 6), Rebel (*n* = 6), Solidarity (*n* = 5), Lazy (*n* = 5), Radical (*n* = 4), Cultural (*n* = 4), Soft (*n* = 4), Unprofessional (*n* = 4), Beautiful (*n* = 3), Hippie (*n* = 3), Rough (*n* = 3), Athletic (*n* = 3), Cool (*n* = 3), Laid back (*n* = 3), Dark (*n* = 3), Gangster (*n* = 3), and Stylish (*n* = 3). Eight of these frequently endorsed associations were unique to the afro condition.

The traits associated with dreadlocs which were endorsed more than twice were: Dirty (*n* = 44), Drug user (*n* = 24), Rastafarian (*n* = 21), Messy (*n* = 14), Unclean (*n* = 11), Hippie (*n* = 11), Nasty (*n* = 9), Reggae (*n* = 9), Smelly (*n* = 8), Rebel (*n* = 8), Lazy (*n* = 8), Ugly (*n* = 7), Unkempt (*n* = 6), Thug (*n* = 4), Gross (*n* = 4), Unprofessional (*n* = 4), Stinky (*n* = 4), Ghetto (*n* = 4), Gangster (*n* = 4), Wanderer (*n* = 4), Hip hop (*n* = 3), Poor (*n* = 3), Criminal (*n* = 3), Easygoing (*n* = 3), Cultural (*n* = 3), Natural (*n* = 3), Athletic (*n* = 3), Older (*n* = 3), Free-spirited (*n* = 3), Laid back (*n* = 3), and Unhygienic (*n* = 3). Nineteen of these frequently endorsed associations were unique to the dreadlocs condition.

The traits associated with straightened/relaxed hair which were endorsed with a frequency greater than 2 were: Clean (*n* = 17), Beautiful (*n* = 11), Pretty (*n* = 11), Classy (*n* = 10), Fake (*n* = 9), Neat (*n* = 6), Attractive (*n* = 5), Nice (*n* =), Assimilative (*n* = 5), Intelligent (*n* = 4), Soft (*n* = 4), Natural (*n* = 4), Feminine (*n* = 4), Upkept (*n* = 3), Unnatural (*n* = 3), Accomplished (*n* = 3), High-Maintenance (*n* = 3), and Professional (*n* = 3). Fifteen of these frequently endorsed associations were unique to the straightened/relaxed hair condition.

It is of note that *natural* was the only association made with each of the three hairstyles, though it was endorsed notably more frequently for afros (*n* = 22) than for straight hair (*n* = 4) or for dreadlocs (*n* = 3). Both afros and dreadlocs were associated with sloppiness (e.g., *unkempt*, *dirty*, *messy*), criminality (e.g., *gangster*), and unprofessionalism (e.g., *unprofessional)*. However, there were unique traits for each of the hairstyles as well. Straightened hair was the only hairstyle associated with *clean*, *professional*, *feminine*, and *pretty*. Afro was the only hairstyle associated with *wild*, *radical*, and *solidarity*. Dreadlocs was the only hairstyle associated with *drug use*, *ghetto*, *nasty*, and *gross*. These findings suggest the existence of unique stereotypical content for the three Black hairstyles afros, dreadlocs, and straightened hair.

Current Study

The current study experimentally examined the effects different hairstyles have on Black women's employment prospects, as well as explored whether bias exists in the conceptualization of employment characteristics. Based on the employment characteristics created by Christman and Branson (1990) and the stereotypes generated in Pilot Study 1, researchers used a mock-LinkedIn paradigm to investigate whether varying

Black hairstyles effect the perceived employment characteristics of Black women. The following hypotheses were formed:

> H1: The same Black woman will be rated differently on employment characteristics when presented with an afro, dreadlocs, and straight hair.
>
> H2: The Black woman with non-straightened (i.e., not chemically or heat altered) hair will be rated lower on employment characteristics than the same woman wearing an afro or dreadlocs.
>
> H3: Unique traits previously associated with afros, dreadlocs, and straight hair would significantly differ as a function of the hairstyle worn by the Black woman in an evaluative employment-based context.

Method

Participants and Design. One hundred thirty-four participants (M_{Age} = 36.85, SD_{Age} = 11.74) were recruited from MTurk, the online crowd sourcing program. Participants were United States citizens over the age of 18, who identified racially as White or Caucasian. Fifty-six percent of participants identified as female and 44% identified as male. A between-subjects design was used for this study, where participants were randomly assigned to one of the 3 conditions. An a priori power analysis indicated that 33 subjects in each of the three groups was necessary to have 80% power for detecting a small effect size when employing the traditional .05 criterion of statistical significance.

Materials. Three mock-LinkedIn profiles were created using photo editing software. The images of the mock-applicant, Kiana Washington, were modified headshots from the SheaMoisture "Good Hair" Study (McGill Johnson et al., 2017). The model was selected from a set of Black and White models that had been previously pretested for attractiveness and distinctiveness. She was styled in an afro, dreadlocs, and

straight hair for each of three of the conditions. Given the model was not noticeably clothed in the original headshot, a black suit and white collared shirt was photoshopped on the target (see Appendices I, J, and K). The targets Linkedin information was informed by the qualifications of real Linkedin members who were consultants at Deloitte and Goldman Sachs, which provide the same financial services as the faux corporation created for the study.

Measures.

Employment Characteristics. Endorsement of the employment characteristics constructed by Christman and Branson (1990) were used to measure employment outcomes. The 22 characteristics fit into four factors researchers defined as personality, power, competence, and professionalism. A total mean score was created for each of the scales (means, standard deviations, and Cronbach's alpha in parentheses). The personality factor is comprised of the traits: intelligent, consistent, self-reliant, dependable, responsible, effective, stable, cooperative, and trustworthy (M = 7.42, SD = 1.35; PERSONALITY Chronbach's $\alpha = 0.963$). The power factor is comprised of the traits: powerful, strong, aggressive, bold, forceful, dynamic, and decisive (M = 6.50, SD = 1.37; POWER Chronbach's $\alpha = 0.880$). The competence factor is comprised of the traits: expert, experienced, and successful (M = 7.25, SD = 1.47; COMPETENCE Chronbach's $\alpha = 0.893$). The professionalism factor is comprised of the traits: professional, businesslike, and efficient (M = 7.62, SD = 1.37; PROFESSIONALISM Chronbach's $\alpha = 0.908$). Participants were instructed to endorse these characteristics on a Likert scale from 1 (*Least Characteristic*) to 9 (*Most Characteristic*). A total mean score was calculated for all employment characteristics using the mean of trait endorsement (M = 7.15, SD = 1.2).

Hair-Specific Traits. Participants were presented with questions concerning the perception of the applicant's character, using traits previously collected in the pilot study that coincide with the different hairstyles. The traits *clean*, *professional*, *feminine*, and *pretty* were included because they were uniquely associated with the straight hair condition in the pilot study. The traits *wild*, *radical*, and *solidarity* were included because they were uniquely associated with the afro condition. Additionally, the traits *drug use*, *ghetto*, *nasty*, and *gross* were included because they were uniquely associated with the dreadlocs condition. Similar to the employment characteristics, the participants were asked to endorse the hair specific traits on a Likert scale from 1 (*Least Characteristic*) to 9 (*Most Characteristic*).

Racism Measure. The Symbolic Racism 2000 scale (SR) is an eight-item measure designed to assess participants' belief system about racial discrimination, Black's unwillingness to take responsibility, and their deservingness of additional resources (Henry & Sears, 2002; see Appendix L). Due to human error, however, only 7 of the 8 items were measured. The response options for 6 of the items presented were from 1 (*Strongly Agree*) to 4 (*Strongly Disagree*). The response format for the final question was 1 (*Trying to push very much too fast*) to 3 (*Moving at about the right speed*). An example of a question from the scale is: "1. It's really a matter of some people not trying hard enough; if blacks would only try harder they could be just as well off as whites." A total score was calculated by summing the raw scores of the 7 questions ($M = 14.51$, $SD = 5.11$; range: 7-26; Chronbach's $\alpha = 0.885$).

Hirablity. Participants were asked how likely they were to hire the applicant for the job described in the cover story. Participants then rated the applicant on a Likert scale from 1 (*Unlikely*) to 10 (*Very Likely*), (M = 7.61, SD = 1.78).

Salary. Participants were asked what an appropriate starting salary would be for the candidate at the company. They were able to freely respond with any number between $20,000 and $200,000, which was established to prevent human error during entry. Anchor salaries were provided following the question with the lowest and highest wages, by state averages, offered for corporate consultants in America (i.e., $52,500 – $108,000). This provided participants with a range for their estimated starting salary.

Demographic Measures. Finally, participants completed a demographics questionnaire which inquired about their age, sex, race, ethnicity, political orientation, sexual orientation, educational attainment, employment status, and the sector in which they work.

Procedure. Participants were informed they were assuming the role of a human resources specialist at a major corporation, which provides auditing, consulting, tax, and advisory services to other companies; their task was to assess one of the randomly prescreened LinkedIn profiles and make a hiring decision regarding a new consultant. All participants were presented with the same LinkedIn profile for the same person, only the hairstyle of the mock-applicant was varied (i.e., afro, dreadlocs, or straight hair). After reviewing each profile, participants were asked to rate the employment characteristics, likability, suggested starting salary, and hirability of the applicant, as well as rate the applicant on unique traits gathered in the pilot study. Finally, participants completed the SR2K and demographics questions.

Results

Overall, participants rated the candidate positively in terms of likeability (M = 5.20, SD = 1.07), personality (M = 7.42, SD = 1.35), power (M = 6.50, SD = 1.37), competence (M = 7.25, SD = 1.47), professionalism (M = 7.62, SD = 1.37), and total employment characteristics (M = 7.15, SD = 1.21). Further, across conditions participants endorsed straight hair traits (M = 6.93, SD = 1.65) for the candidate significantly more than afro traits (M = 3.38, SD = 1.73), which were endorsed significantly more than dreadloc traits (M = 1.81, SD = 1.59), $F(2,132) = 265.178$, $p < 0.0005$.

A one-way MANCOVA was conducted to determine whether there was a significant difference of endorsement for the personality factor, power factor, competence factor, and professionalism factor between hairstyle conditions (i.e., straight hair, afro, and dreadlocs), with the mean SR2K score used as a covariate. There was no statistically significant difference between the hairstyle conditions on the combined dependent variables after controlling for symbolic racism, $F(8, 242) = 1.626$, $p = .118$, Wilks' $\Lambda = .901$, partial $\eta 2 = .051$. For a graphic representation of cell-means, see Figure 1.

Another one-way MANCOVA was conducted to determine whether there was a significant difference of endorsement for straight hair traits, afro traits, and dreadlock traits between hairstyle conditions, with the mean SR2K score used as a covariate. There was no statistically significant difference between the hairstyle conditions on the combined dependent variables after controlling for symbolic racism, $F(6, 252) = .751$, $p = .609$, Wilks' $\Lambda = .965$, partial $\eta 2 = .018$. For a graphic representation of cell-means, see Figure 2.

Discussion

It was hypothesized that a Black woman with a non-straightened (i.e., not chemically or heat altered) hairstyle depicted in her LinkedIn profile would be rated lower on employment characteristics than when she was presented wearing straightened hair. The findings of the current study did not support this hypothesis. The mock-applicant was rated similarly regardless of whether she was wearing an afro, dreadlocs, or straightened hair. Additionally, it was hypothesized that the unique traits previously associated with afros, dreadlocs, and straight hair in the Pilot Study would significantly differ as a function of the hairstyle worn by the Black woman in an evaluative employment-based context. The findings of the study did not support this hypothesis. Additionally, the mock-applicant was rated consistently on the hair traits regardless of the hairstyle condition. Therefore, varying the applicant's hairstyle while holding all other aspects of the LinkedIn photo and profile constant did not significantly affect the way participants rated her on traits generated in the Pilot Study for the different hairstyles.

One potential explanation as to why hair style had no influence on evaluations of the mock-applicant, Kiana, was because her qualifications were too high. Past research suggests that participants express prejudice when the qualifications of a target are ambiguous, but not when participants are highly qualified or clearly unqualified (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000). For example, Dovidio and Gaertner (2000) randomly presented White participants with faux interview excerpts for a peer counseling program at the university where the study was conducted. The quality of the applicant's interview was manipulated (i.e., strong, ambiguous, or weak), as well as applicant race (i.e., White or Black). They found no significant difference in ratings of Black and White job applicants when the

interviews were either strong or weak. However, participants discriminated against Black candidates, relative to White candidates, when the qualifications for the applicant were ambiguous. Participants rated the Black applicant with ambiguous qualifications less positively and were less likely to recommend the candidate. In a separate measure of recommendation strength, the Black applicant with ambiguous qualifications was also recommended less strongly in comparison to the ambiguously qualified White applicant. The findings of Dovidio and Gaertner (2000) were also consistent with previous theory on modern racism, which suggests that in the contemporary United States, more subtle forms of racism are prominent and must be measured using questions that indirectly relate to racial attitudes (McConahay, 1986). Therefore, the mock-applicant's strong qualifications and previous experience at a well-known company may have limited the ambiguity and led to more self-monitoring by the participants to avoid appearing biased.

It is important note that previous research has, however, failed to support how White participants rate Black job candidates negatively as a function of their hairstyle. Opie and Phillips (2015) found that Black participants, but not White participants, gave an agency penalty to the Black employment candidates when they donned Afrocentric hairstyles, as opposed to straight hair. Researchers suggested this negative evaluation from Black participants could be the result of a concern that perceptions of dominance from the applicant may negatively reflect on Black people in general.

The current study did not find a significant difference in the way White participants rated Black participants on measures of dominance and professionalism, regardless of the hairstyle they were wearing. Nonetheless, these findings do not suggest that hairstyles do not impact Black women's employment prospects. Rather, future work

is necessary to explore the context and conditions in which these biases may play out. Although the current experiment did not find hairstyle to significantly affect White participants endorsement of Black applicants' personality, power, competence, or professionalism, the current pilot-study did find that White participants are aware of unique character traits that are associated with different Black hairstyles (e.g., professionalism associated with straight hair). One of the aforementioned theories could explain this discrepancy between the awareness of associations and the application of these associations in an evaluative context.

Limitations.

A limitation of the current study was the use of a single target for the stimuli. Choosing one woman for the study allowed for the control of any possible confounding variables; however, the use of one target allows for anything unique about her physical characteristics to influence the way she is perceived in each condition. Limited empirical research has been conducted to investigate how Black hairstyles are perceived, but research shows that physical characteristics can vary the perception of Black people (Maddox, 2004). The Afrocentric features of the model could have led to a particular categorization (through impression formation) or strongly primed the participant for race, leading to a plateau effect on characteristic endorsements. Participants may have rated the applicant the way they would rate any highly racialized Black person in an evaluative context. Further, the participants education, qualifications, and experience were all taken from a candidate who was determined to be qualified for a similar job at a real corporation. This could have diminished the differences in perception that would have

otherwise been seen between the same Black applicant with less experience, poorer grades, and fewer qualifications.

Future directions. Future research should investigate the impact of hairstyles in the same employment context (via LinkedIn), but alter the candidate's qualifications to create more ambiguity. Manipulating applicable experience and skill endorsement could create the appropriate ambiguity to affect the perception of applicants. An applicant with less relevant experience would require the participant to make a more complex judgement about the applicant and their potential qualification for the position. A study with this design could determine whether the current findings are replicated for applicants who are highly qualified or particularly unqualified, but not replicated with an ambiguously qualified applicant. Furthermore, endorsement of LinkedIn skills is intended to provide reassurance that the applicant holds a particular skillset, similar to skills and references sections on résumés. The manipulation of skill endorsement could also introduce more ambiguity in the qualifications of the candidate. These adjustments to the study design could avoid the potential confounding of self-monitoring that occurs in less ambiguous decision making.

Researchers also intend to incorporate multiple images of models, as well as multiple images of models wearing the same hairstyle with their hair texture, in future research. Redesigning studies to incorporate other physical characteristics as variables can provide information about potential interactions the attributes may have with Black hairstyles, which affect perception.

Conclusion. Participants in the current study reported unique stereotypes associated with Black hairstyles (i.e., afros, dreadlocs, straightened hair), suggesting the

existence of unique stereotypical content for each of the hairstyles that may impact the perceptions of Black women. Although the findings of the current study failed to support the hypothesis that Black women with non-straightened hairstyles would be rated lower on employment characteristics, the findings provide information about contexts in which these judgements may not be relevant. Further, suggestions for future study designs can inform future researchers with interest in the varied perceptions of Black women by hairstyle.

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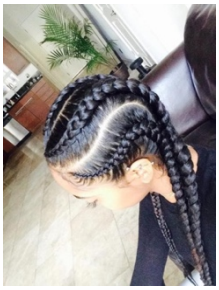
Appendix A

Black hairstyle stimuli used in Pilot Study

Afros

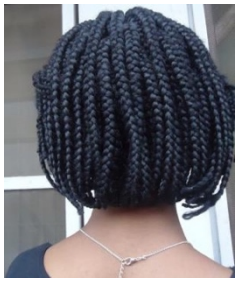
Cornrows



Dreadlocs

Fade

Box Braids



Voluminous Natural Style

Straight Hair

Appendix B

Word Cloud for Afro

Appendix C

Word Cloud for Cornrows

Appendix D

Word Cloud for Dreadlocs

Appendix E

Word Cloud for Fade

Appendix F

Word Cloud for Box Braids

Appendix G

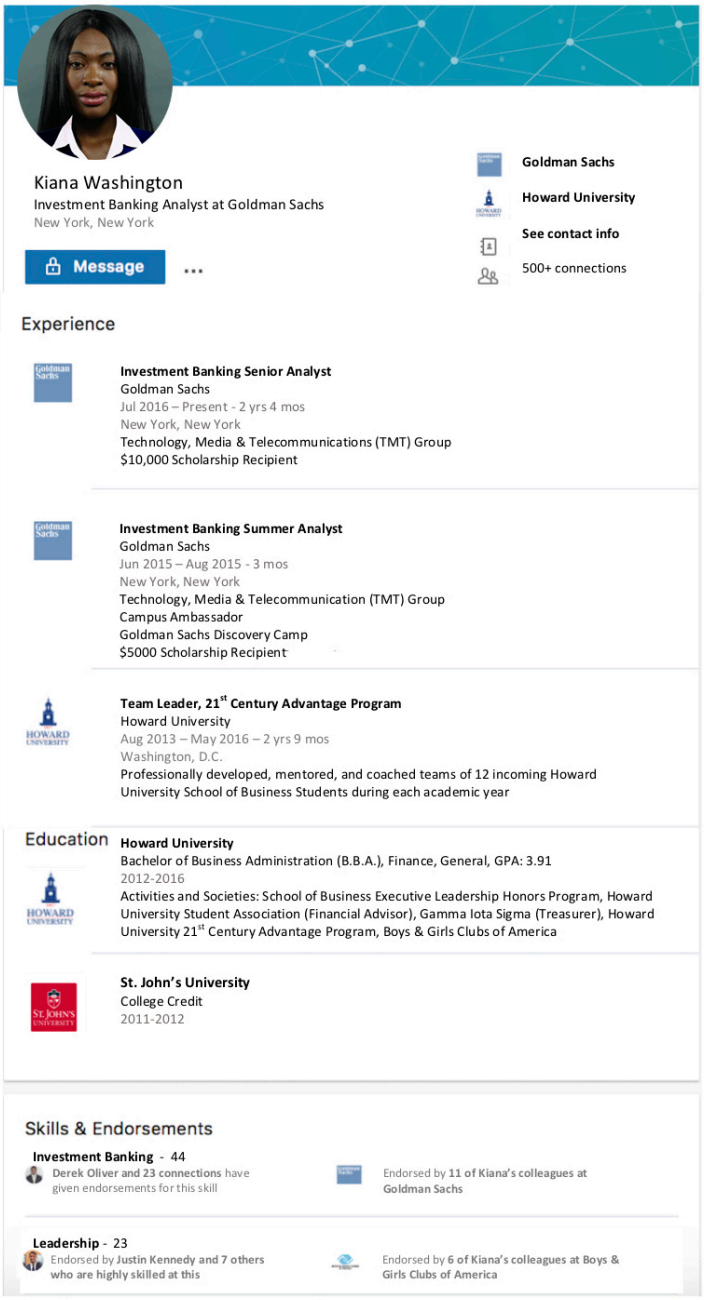
Word Cloud for Straight Hair

Appendix H

Word Cloud for Voluminous Natural Style

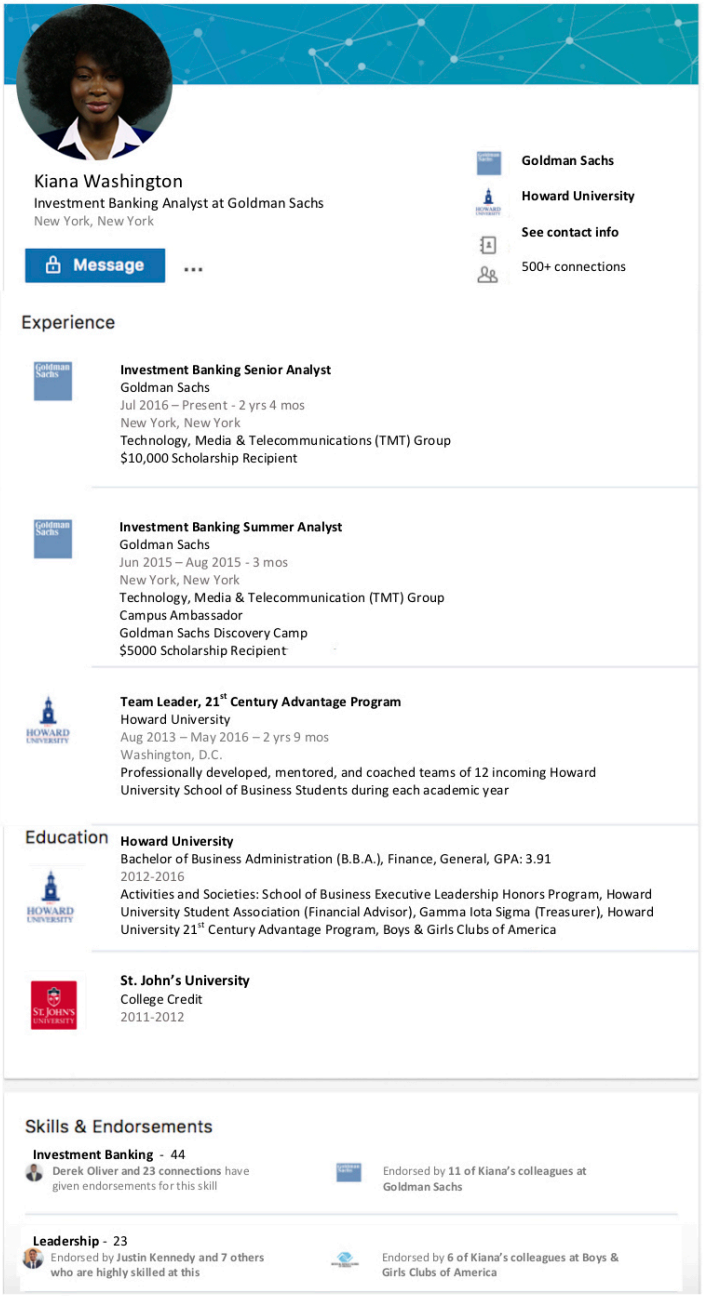
Appendix I

LinkedIn Stimuli for Straight Hair Condition



Appendix J

LinkedIn Stimuli for Afro Condition



Kiana Washington
Investment Banking Analyst at Goldman Sachs
New York, New York

Message ...

Goldman Sachs
Howard University
See contact info
500+ connections

Experience

Investment Banking Senior Analyst
Goldman Sachs
Jul 2016 – Present - 2 yrs 4 mos
New York, New York
Technology, Media & Telecommunications (TMT) Group
$10,000 Scholarship Recipient

Investment Banking Summer Analyst
Goldman Sachs
Jun 2015 – Aug 2015 - 3 mos
New York, New York
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Campus Ambassador
Goldman Sachs Discovery Camp
$5000 Scholarship Recipient

Team Leader, 21st Century Advantage Program
Howard University
Aug 2013 – May 2016 – 2 yrs 9 mos
Washington, D.C.
Professionally developed, mentored, and coached teams of 12 incoming Howard University School of Business Students during each academic year

Education

Howard University
Bachelor of Business Administration (B.B.A.), Finance, General, GPA: 3.91
2012-2016
Activities and Societies: School of Business Executive Leadership Honors Program, Howard University Student Association (Financial Advisor), Gamma Iota Sigma (Treasurer), Howard University 21st Century Advantage Program, Boys & Girls Clubs of America

St. John's University
College Credit
2011-2012

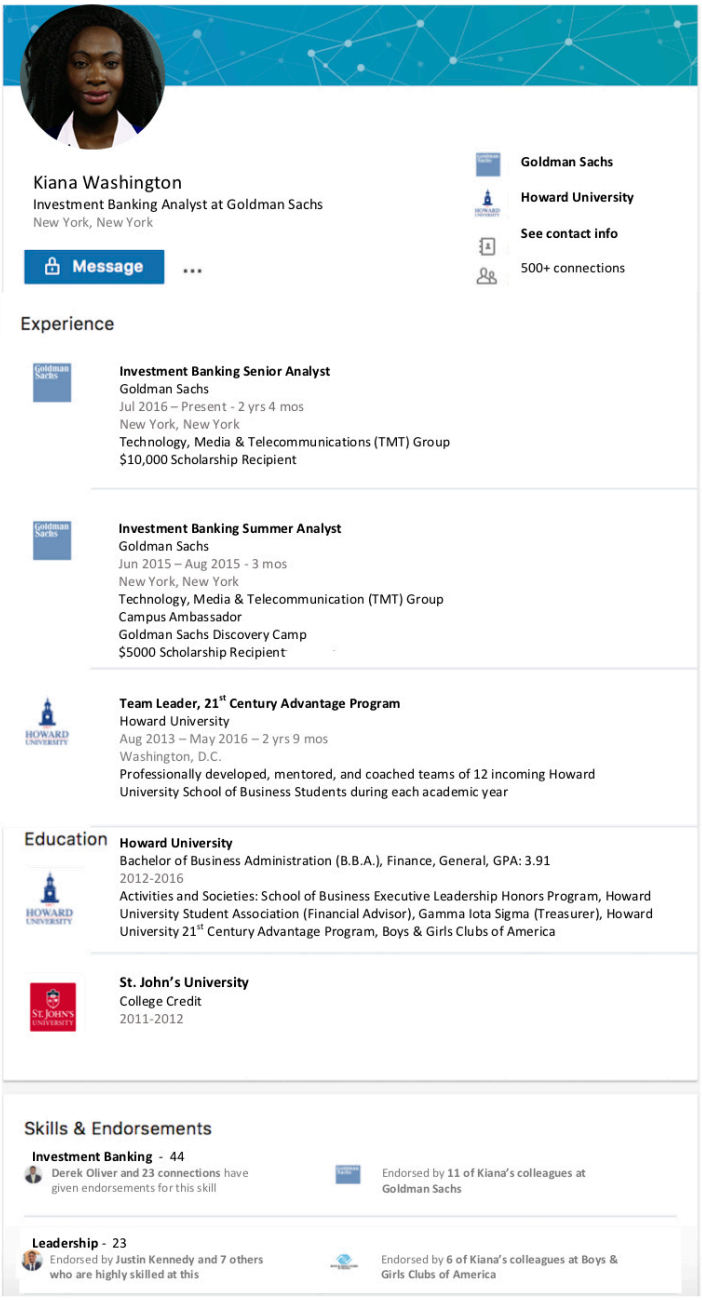
Skills & Endorsements

Investment Banking - 44
Derek Oliver and 23 connections have given endorsements for this skill
Endorsed by 11 of Kiana's colleagues at Goldman Sachs

Leadership - 23
Endorsed by Justin Kennedy and 7 others who are highly skilled at this
Endorsed by 6 of Kiana's colleagues at Boys & Girls Clubs of America

Appendix K

LinkedIn Stimuli for Dreadlocs Condition



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Appendix L

The Symbolic Racism 2000 Scale

1. It's really a matter of some people not trying hard enough; if blacks would only try harder they could be just as well off as whites.
<1> Strongly agree
<2> Somewhat agree
<3> Somewhat disagree
<4> Strongly disagree

2. Irish, Italian, Jewish and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same.
<1> Strongly agree
<2> Somewhat agree
<3> Somewhat disagree
<4> Strongly disagree

3. Some say that black leaders have been trying to push too fast. Others feel that they haven't pushed fast enough. What do you think?
<1> Trying to push very much too fast
<2> Going too slowly
<3> Moving at about the right speed

4. How much of the racial tension that exists in the United States today do you think blacks are responsible for creating?
<1> All of it
<2> Most
<3> Some
<4> Not much at all

5. How much discrimination against blacks do you feel there is in the United States today, limiting their chances to get ahead?
<1> A lot
<2> Some
<3> Just a little
<4> None at all

6. Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for blacks to work their way out of the lower class.
<1> Strongly agree
<2> Somewhat agree
<3> Somewhat disagree
<4> Strongly disagree

7. Over the past few years, blacks have gotten less than they deserve.
<1> Strongly agree
<2> Somewhat agree
<3> Somewhat disagree
<4> Strongly disagree

8. Over the past few years, blacks have gotten more economically than they deserve. *
<1> Strongly agree
<2> Somewhat agree
<3> Somewhat disagree
<4> Strongly disagree

* Question that was not included in the study due to human error

Table 1

Most frequent associations made with Afros

Trait	**Frequency**	**Trait**	**Frequency**
Natural	22	Attention seeking	2
Wild	16	Attractive	2
Retro	14	Clean	2
Unkempt	12	Drug use	2
Dirty	7	Dry	2
Messy	6	Ethnic	2
Rebel	6	Fashionable	2
Solidarity	5	Free	2
Lazy	5	Fun	2
Radical	4	Ghetto	2
Cultural	4	Happy	2
Soft	4	Hip	2
Unprofessional	4	Nurturer	2
Beautiful	3	Proud	2
Hippie	3	Rasta	2
Rough	3	Sloppy	2
Athletic	3	Smelly	2
Cool	3	Smooth	2
Laid back	3	Soulful	2
Rough	3	Statement	2
Dark	3	Ugly	2
Gangster	3	Unclean	2
Stylish	3	Unique	2
		Wiry	2

Table 2

Most frequent associations made with Dreadlocs

Trait	Frequency	Trait	Frequency
Dirty	44	Cultural	3
Drug user	24	Natural	3
Rastafarian	21	Athletic	3
Messy	14	Older	3
Unclean	11	Free-spirited	3
Hippie	11	Laid back	3
Nasty	9	Unhygienic	3
Reggae	9	Beautiful	2
Smelly	8	Dangerous	2
Rebel	8	Dark	2
Lazy	8	Exotic	2
Ugly	7	Homeless	2
Unkempt	6	Nonconformist	2
Thug	4	Predator	2
Gross	4	Relaxed	2
Unprofessional	4	Rockstar	2
Stinky	4	Singer	2
Ghetto	4	Statement	2
Gangster	4	Stylish	2
Wanderer	4	Traditional	2
Hip hop	3	Unique	2
Poor	3	Unwashed	2
Criminal	3	Violent	2
Easygoing	3		

Table 3

Most frequent associations made with Straightened Hair

Trait	**Frequency**	**Trait**	**Frequency**
Clean	17	Professional	3
Beautiful	11	Well-Groomed	2
Pretty	11	Go-getter	2
Classy	10	Fashionable	2
Fake	9	Business	2
Neat	6	Average	2
Attractive	5	Simple	2
Nice	5	Conservative	2
Assimilative	5	Modern	2
Intelligent	4	In Control	2
Soft	4	Young	2
Natural	4	White-Washed	2
Feminine	4	Respected	2
Upkept	3	Independent	2
Unnatural	3	Stylish	2
Accomplished	3	Sexy	2
High-Maintenance	3	Touchable	2

Figure 1

Mean trait endorsement of employment characteristic factors by hairstyle condition

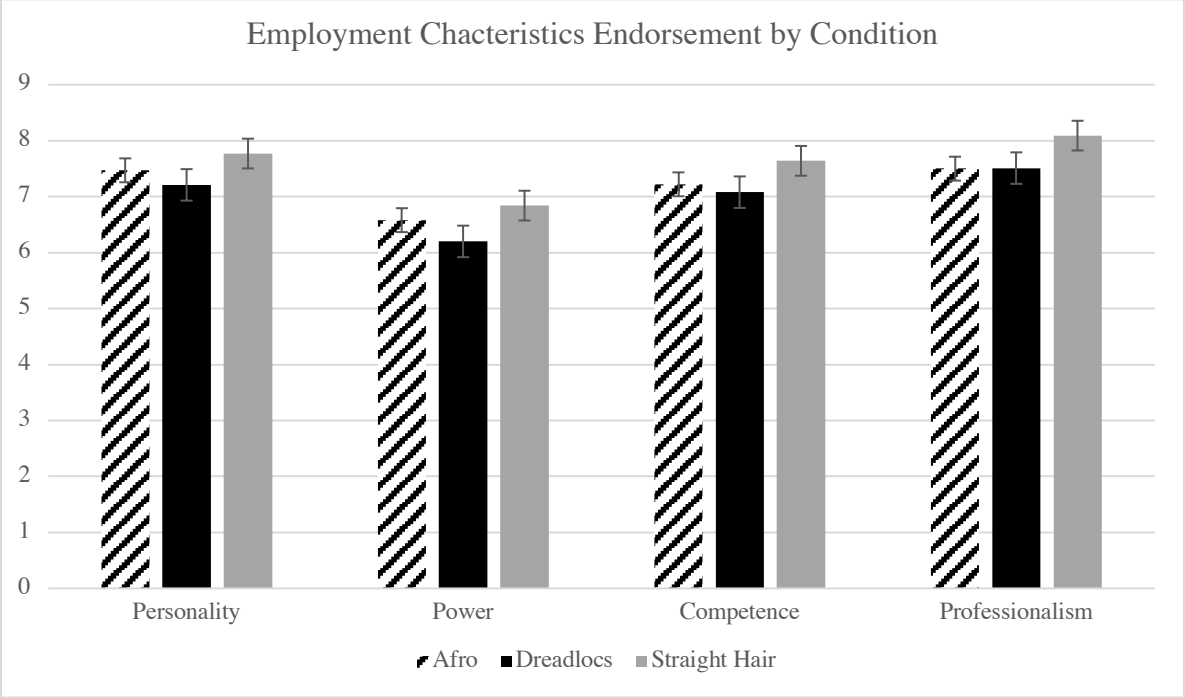

Figure 2

Mean trait endorsement of hairstyle traits by hairstyle condition