Let My Hair Be Me:

An Investigation of Employee Authenticity and Organizational Appearance Policies Through the Lens of Black Women's Hair

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Abstract: Appearance policies — formal or informal dress codes that set organizational expectations for how employees "should" appear at work (Pratt & Rafaeli, 1997; Society for Human Resource Management, 2016) are typically based on Eurocentric ideals of professionalism (Bell & Nkomo, 2003). Appearance policies are often enforced by well-intentioned managers striving to foster a professional workforce (Society for Human Resource Management, 2016), yet such policies may conflict with increasing organizational efforts to encourage employee authenticity. The current paper investigates how men, the primary decision-makers in the workplace, evaluate Black women's Afrocentric hair

at work. The paper focuses on Black women because they are often at the bottom of the workplace hierarchy (Catalyst, 2016b) and are confronted with both gender and racial inequities. The paper focuses on hair because it is a visual display of identity (Opie & Phillips, 2015) and fashion (Barnard, 2014) that may reflect how individuals choose to express their authenticity (Opie & Freeman, 2017). Further, hair is subjectively evaluated based on societal notions of professionalism, making Black women's hair a helpful, intersectional lens through which to investigate the gendered and racialized bounds of workplace appearance.

Organizations manage employee appearance using appearance policies — formal or informal dress codes that set organizational expectations for how employees "should" appear at work (Pratt & Rafaeli, 1997; Society for Human Resource Management, 2016). Typically based on Eurocentric ideals of professionalism (Bell & Nkomo, 2003), appearance policies are often enforced by well-intentioned managers striving to foster a professional workforce (Society for Human Resource Management, 2016). Given the taken-for-granted status of appearance policies, it is rare for organizations to have robust discussions about the necessity and possible negative consequences of these policies. This is unfortunate because conformity to appearance policies may have significant negative implications for employees' workplace success, as employees who violate appearance policies may be reprimanded, reassigned, or terminated. Appearance policies are supported by the law (Caldwell, 1991) and leading human resource organizations provide guidance on how to control employee appearance (Society for Human Resource Management, 2016). Interestingly, although organizations may be working hard to control employee appearance, research illustrates that the concept of authenticity, also referred to as "bring your whole self to work," has far-reaching benefits for organizations and employees. Specifically, when employees exercise individual agency by sharing aspects of their identity, organizational cultures may become more inclusive and organizations and individuals alike may benefit (Chraibi & Cukier, 2017).

While appearance policies may help organizations in various sectors and locales (e.g., businesses, hospitals, militaries, non-profits, etc. around the globe) manage customer perceptions and reinforce consistent organizational branding, such policies may conflict with increasing organizational efforts to encourage employee authenticity. Authenticity is a fundamental component of human thriving (Kernis & Goldman, 2006) and is defined as the "alignment between one's internal experiences and external expressions" (Roberts, Cha, Hewlin, & Settles, 2009, p. 3).

Thus, employee authenticity refers to employees' sense that, in the workplace, their internal experiences and external expressions are aligned. Appearance is a visual indicator of authenticity that may manifest in employees' choices about how to dress, style their hair, whether or not to wear religious garb or to wear makeup, etc.

Appearance choices are identity-relevant as they help to define and distinguish cultural and subcultural groups (Keblusek & Giles, 2017). Further, employee choice about appearance may reflect personal effort to express unique aspects of the self. Appearance policies may inhibit employee authenticity, particularly disadvantaging employees with appearances that deviate from Eurocentric (Bell & Nkomo, 2003; Rosette & Dumas, 2007), heteronormative, masculine norms (Barry, 2015). Inhibiting employee authenticity may have negative consequences for employees and organizations. Research indicates that employees

who involuntarily conform to organizational norms may experience painful psychological distress and a sense of meaninglessness (Erickson & Wharton, 1997; Hochschild, 2012). As time passes, inauthenticity may contribute to emotional exhaustion, guilt, and shame, and less desire to stay within an organization (Hewlin, 2009). Is it worth it to organizations to enforce appearance policies given the negative consequences of employee inauthenticity?

A critical first step in this line of inquiry about appearance policies and employee authenticity is to document current attitudes about employee appearance that may deviate from Eurocentric ideals of professionalism.

The current paper investigates how men, the primary decision-makers in the workplace, evaluate Black women's Afrocentric hair at work.

The paper focuses on women because despite progressing into most fields of employment, earning Board seats, CEO posts, and other top executive positions, women as a whole continue to experience workplace inequities. The paper focuses on Black women because they are often at the bottom of the workplace hierarchy (Catalyst, 2016b) and are confronted with both gender and racial inequities. The paper focuses on hair because it is a visual display of identity (Opie & Phillips, 2015) and fashion (Barnard, 2014) that may reflect how individuals choose to express their authenticity (Opie & Freeman, 2017). Further, hair is subjectively evaluated based on societal notions of professionalism, making Black women's hair a helpful lens through which to investigate the gendered and racialized bounds of workplace appearance.

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Appearance Management in the Workplace

The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), the world's largest professional society for human resource professionals, has 285,000 members in more than 165 countries (Society for Human Resource Management, n.d.). SHRM recommends that organizations manage employee appearance, even providing a detailed rationale for dress appearance policies:

> **Employers realize that impressions made on clients and customers are important to the success of an organization. Employees typically are the "face" of the company, and employers are finding it increasingly advisable to control that image. In the past, employers used dress and appearance policies to help employees work comfortably and safely while still projecting a professional image to clients, customers and future employees. Employers over the years also have used dress and appearance policies to help create an employment brand. Some organizations intentionally use dress to create a specific perception or certain image as an employer. Dress codes help employers fulfill these varying goals of comfort, professionalism, safety, brand and image (Society for Human Resource Management, 2016, Business Case section, para. 2)**

SHRM notes that organizations must be careful that their appearance policies do not discriminate based on protected categories, such as gender or race (Society for Human Resource Management, 2016, Legal Issues Section, Gender disparities and Appearance and race paragraphs). For example, SHRM notes that organizations can have grooming requirements that employees be neat but organizations cannot prohibit employees from wearing Afro hairstyles, because this hairstyle is considered to be an immutable trait (i.e., not the result of choice) of Black people. Yet, organizations can legally tell employees that they cannot wear dreadlock hairstyles, because this hairstyle is considered to be a mutable trait (i.e., the result of choice) (Finley, 2016; Opie & Freeman, 2017). Further, organizations have been legally protected when firing women who refuse to wear makeup (Harvard Law

Review, 2006). Thus, while appearance policies ostensibly apply to all employees, such policies may have unintended consequences for members of historically underrepresented groups, such as women and Black women.

Women and Appearance Management in the Workplace

Women have constrained choice when it comes to creating a workplace appearance that projects a "professional" image. Specifically, gendered perceptions often tether women to sexualized bodies, which are viewed as obstacles to a woman's career success (Entwistle, 2015). For example, as women began entering the workforce in increasing numbers and started to enter historically male-dominated employment fields, women were advised to "power dress," that is, to wear a uniform that conveys authority and power, attributes associated with men and masculinity (Entwistle, 1997). The notion of professional business appearance as "uniform" helps to illuminate the role that business appearance serves in the workplace. Specifically, uniforms help to demarcate one group from another (i.e., business professionals versus others), shift focus from individuals to the group represented by the uniform, and provide a means to ensure conformity to the group (Joseph & Alex, 1972).

Understanding business appearance as uniform elucidates why, for example, women were advised to get the right haircut or wear shorter hairstyles, as longer hair might appear too messy or emphasize their femininity and thus undermine their credibility in the workplace (Clift & Brazaitis, 2003; Moneypenny & McGregor, 2013). Such appearance advice for women to mimic men and deemphasize feminine traits was designed to increase the perception that women possessed masculine attributes (e.g., competence, drive, etc.) so that women could minimize and overcome negative gender stereotypes. In other words, women's business appearance uniform was constructed so that women were more likely to be viewed as business professionals (i.e., demarcation), members of the professional class (i.e., shift focus from women as individuals to women as part of the professional

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group), and as conforming to professional norms (i.e., conformity). Yet, little consideration has been given to how the uniform of contemporary business professionals came to be.

Outside of fashion studies, many people are unaware of the origins of the most ubiquitous symbol of business professionalism: the business suit. When asked, even management researchers and practitioners in the field of diversity and inclusion were unable to identify where the business suit originated (Opie, 2017, April). The business suit originated in the European royal court in 1666. Charles II introduced the three-piece suit as a symbol of restraint in response to criticisms from religious and economic leaders that the crown had lost its moral authority because of decadence, effeminacy, and emphasis on the consumption of material goods (Kuchta, 2002). Enter Beau Brummell in 1799, a British trendsetter who ascended the social ladder by giving fashion advice to wealthy, elite individuals. Brummell popularized more tailored, reserved suits that were initially used as lounging attire. Eventually, the use of lounging attire spread and evolved into expected workplace attire. Despite the suit's pervasiveness in contemporary times, most scholars, practitioners, and managers are likely unaware of its Eurocentric history. This brief case study of the suit illustrates how cultural norms, specific to one country or region, have become taken-for-granted indicators of professionalism (Opie & Freeman, 2017).

While women may don "uniforms," such as the business suit, to increase workplace success, research suggests that women (and perhaps men) prefer to wear fashion that reflects personal connections, identity, and achievement **(Almila, 2015; see fig. 1).** Further, women tend to touch and wear their clothing before purchasing it to assess if the clothing is "them" and to consider how others will judge the clothing (Derrington, 2009). Thus, donning uniforms may come at a cost if women suppress how they would prefer to dress and style themselves in order to obtain workplace success (Hewlin, 2003, 2009).

FIGURE 1

Afro-textured hair can be fashioned into a variety of styles such as twists, updos, braids, afros, and locks.

The Intersectional Experience of Black Women and Appearance Management in the Workplace

Black women contend with the aforementioned gender constraints on appearance, as well as racialized constraints. Hair is a helpful tool for examining the unique, intersectional challenges confronted by Black women (Johnson, 2013). Hair is an important though understudied element of the business uniform that is full of symbolic meaning (Berry, 2008) and that has important implications for identity and authenticity in the workplace. Because of its mutable nature, how one decides to groom their hair may communicate self-identity and values (Johnson, 2013), making hair a key way to construct, preserve, and alter one's identity (Opie & Phillips, 2015; Sheane, 2012; Weitz, 2001).

Historically, Black hair was characterized as the antithesis of Whiteness; that is, Black hair was portrayed as the antithesis of what is good, proper, and beautiful (Thompson, 2009). In fact, Black hair was sometimes not even called "hair" but "wool," likening it more to animal fur than human hair (Byrd & Tharps, 2001). Such conceptions dehumanized Black people, suggesting that Black people were sub-human, more like animals than people (Dash, 2006; Holmes, 2016).

Advertisements encouraged Black people to straighten their hair so that they would be more socially accepted and desired, perhaps even more humanized. Straight hair signified collective progress and higher economic class. Black hair that was straightened, conforming to Eurocentric norms of beauty, was

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[1] **Naturally textured hair refers to women wearing their hair in a chemically unaltered state that reveals its naturally wavy, coily, or kinky texture. While some Black women have naturally straight hair, textured hair characterizes the majority of Black women (Mintel, 2016).**

privileged over natural, kinky textured hair (Thompson, 2009). Hair is second only to skin color in determining "Blackness" (Mercer, 1994). In the case of Black women in particular, Afrocentric or naturally textured[1] hairstyles that reflect African heritage (Johnson, 2013) are often viewed as being in violation of workplace appearance norms; and, therefore, labelled as unprofessional. The message that Afrocentric hair is unprofessional or undesirable is reinforced by advertising and cultural norms and reified by the law, which allows employers to discriminate based on employee hairstyle (Caldwell, 1991).

Contemporary media cases illustrate that hair remains a policed domain for Black women. For example, a manager of a New York branch of Banana Republic instructed an African-American employee, 19-year-old Destiny Thompkins, that her braided hairstyle violated the company's dress code. Specifically, Thompkins' manager stated, "It is a little too urban and unkempt for our look and image. We were wondering if you could take them out." Thompkins shared her experience on social media and the news media picked up her story. Banana Republic launched an investigation of the incident and the manager was subsequently fired. An excerpt from the company's statement noted, "Banana Republic has zero tolerance for discrimination. This situation was completely unacceptable, counter to our policies, and in no way reflects our company's beliefs and values" (Nelson, 2017). Media outlets such as Essence Magazine, Teen Vogue, The Atlantic, the BBC, NPR, and other popular outlets have discussed the discrimination that Black women face based on their hairstyles (e.g., see Bates, 2017; Dirshe, 2018; Honey, 2017; Sini, 2016; Wilkinson, 2016). This landscape explains why Black women are particularly susceptible to hair policing in the workplace, experiencing pressure to conform to Eurocentric standards of hair grooming (Opie & Phillips, 2015).

The process of attaining "beautiful" (i.e., Eurocentric) hair has been described as violent as Black women may endure, among other things, physical discomfort and a symbolic stripping away of their African heritage when they chemically straighten their hair (Oyedemi, 2016). Black people spend much time, energy, and money on their hair, as evidenced by the presence of multiple barbershops and salons in Black neighborhoods (Mercer, 1994); as well, Black people spend considerable expenditures on hair care products and styling, with the Black haircare market estimated at

$2.5 billion (Mintel, 2017). Black people clearly give thought to their hair and this makes it more difficult when Black employees experience hair policing in the workplace. It is important to note that I am not arguing that for Black women, natural hair = authentic and Eurocentric hair = inauthentic.

At issue here is that Black women should have the freedom to wear their hair however they choose to, without fear of negative consequence if they dare don their natural tresses at work.

The case of Chastity Jones exemplifies the workplace pressures and hair policing that Black women may endure as a result of Eurocentric-biased appearance policies. In 2010, Jones received a formal job offer from an insurance company. However, the firm reneged on its employment offer when Jones would not cut off her dreadlocks, a hairstyle the firm claimed violated its appearance policies. Specifically, a human resources manager complained that dreadlocks "tend to get messy" and therefore violated the firm's requirement that all employees convey "a professional and businesslike image." Jones filed suit against the firm. Jones lost the lawsuit because the court ruled that while firms cannot discriminate based on hair texture (an immutable trait that employees do not choose), firms can legally discriminate based on hairstyle (a mutable trait that employees can or cannot choose to display). Thus, the organization's appearance policies and the law mutually support the attitude that certain Afrocentric hairstyles are not acceptable (Opie & Freeman, 2017).

In essence, Black women's hair is a contested domain, subject to organizational policing. Further, such policing is validated by appearance policies, ostensibly designed to ensure a professional workforce, and the law, which supports organizational efforts to control employee appearance.

The current study investigates lay attitudes about the professionalism of women's hair in the workplace. Specifically, the study examines whether or not men have bias against Black women's Afrocentric hair **(see fig. 2).**

FIGURE 2

Petra E. Lewis, professional ghost(writer), ghostblogger, author, and entrepreneur; https://about.me/pelewis#.

Methods

Stimuli

The author and a professional Photoshop expert worked together to select three images of White women and two images of Black women from iStockPhoto, an online photography provider, to facilitate the testing of actor effects. In all images, actors had a facial position that was square to the camera, wore hairstyles that did not obstruct the shoulders or the face, and donned a professional suit that could be seen in the picture (see Opie & Phillips, 2015 for further details on how stimuli were developed). There were no actor effects, so images were collapsed across race condition. Further, there were no differences between Afrocentric hairstyle (i.e., afro or dreadlock hair) or between Eurocentric hairstyle (i.e., straight or relaxed hair) conditions so hairstyle conditions were collapsed, resulting in two hairstyle conditions: Afrocentric and Eurocentric.

Participants

Two hundred participants recruited via Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) completed the study. 187 participants passed both the gender and race manipulation checks and data from these individuals were used in the analyses[2]. Of the 187 participants who passed the manipulation checks, 105 identified as women, 80 identified as men and 2 participants did not indicate their sex. Participants had an average age of 35.42 years (Min = 19, Max = 71, SD = 11.57). 97% of the participants indicated that they had work experience. Participants self-identified as White (n = 153, 81.8%), Black (n = 15, 8.0%), Latino (n = 9, 4.8%), Asian (n = 7, 3.7%), and Other (n = 3, 1.6%). The survey was approximately five minutes long and participants were paid $1.00 for their participation.

[2] **13 individuals failed to properly answer the manipulation checks: 2 participants misidentified the target as a male; 11 participants recognized the target as being other than Black or White. Results did not change when the full data set was used.**

Procedure

After giving informed consent, participants randomly viewed one of the stimuli and read: "People regularly read personalities just from people's faces. In this survey, you will see a head shot and answer various questions about the person's personality based on their face."

Measures

MANIPULATION CHECK

Participants were asked, "What is the race/ethnicity of the person in this image? Please check the ONE that you think best matches." Participants could choose from the following options: African-American/Black, Asian American, Latino(a), Caucasian/European-American, Native American, Middle Eastern, and Other.

PERCEPTIONS OF EMPLOYMENT CANDIDATE

To assess professionalism, we measured participants' ratings of the candidate's professionalism by using a three-item scale: How professional is this person; how likely is this person to succeed in corporate America; and how powerful is this person? The scale was reliable, $\alpha = .78$. Participants also rated the targets on creativity and attractiveness. All items were on a 1-point to 7-point scale with higher scores indicating more of the relevant attributes.

WORK EXPERIENCE

Work experience was assessed by asking participants how many years of work experience they have. This variable was entered as a control because work experience may influence perceptions of professionalism.

Results

Using SPSS statistical software, a Participant Sex (Male, Female) by Hairstyle (Eurocentric, Afrocentric) MANCOVA with participants' years of work experience as a covariate on evaluation of employment candidates yielded a significant main effect for participant sex, such that, compared to females, males rated employment candidates as less professional, $F(1,185) = 5.3$, $p < .04$, $\eta p^2 = .03$; less creative, $F(1,185) = 6.57$, $p < .01$, $\eta p^2 = .04$; and less attractive, $F(1,185) = 11.13$, $p < .001$, $\eta p^2 = .06$.

The model also yielded a significant main effect for hairstyle, such that, as compared to employment candidates with Eurocentric hairstyles, participants rated employment candidates with Afrocentric hairstyles as less professional, $F(1,185) = 30.5$, $p < .001$, $\eta p^2 = .15$; more creative, $F(1,185) = 6.34$, $p < .01$, $\eta p^2 = .03$; and less attractive, $F(1,185) = 21.79$, $p < .001$, $\eta p^2 = .11$. There was also a significant interaction between participant sex and candidate hairstyle, such that there was an effect of Afrocentric hairstyle on evaluations of employment candidates' professionalism, $F(1,185) = 4.18$, $p < .05$, $\eta p^2 = .02$, and attractiveness, $F(1,185) = 13.13$, $p < .001$, $\eta p^2 = .07$. The interaction was not significant for creativity, $F(1,185) = .12$, n.s.

Further, we examined how participants rated only Afrocentric hair in order to isolate the contrast between men and women rating Afrocentric hair. Planned contrasts revealed the predicted patterns. Male participants rated Afrocentric hair as significantly less professional ($M = 4.25$, $SD = 1.06$) than did women ($M = 4.9$, $SD = .87$), $t(93) = 3.27$, $p < .01$. The same pattern emerged for creativity, where men rated candidates with Afrocentric hair as less creative ($M = 4.9$, $SD = 1.13$) than did women ($M = 5.42$, $SD = .98$), $t(93) = 2.39$, $p < .05$. Finally, men rated candidates with Afrocentric hair as less attractive ($M = 4.40$, $SD = 1.26$) than did women ($M = 5.71$, $SD = 1.26$), $t(93) = 5.01$, $p < .001$. Strikingly, there were no significant gender effects when men and women rated candidates with Eurocentric hair for professionalism, creativity, or attractiveness.

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Study Discussion

Study results revealed a gender effect such that men, as compared to women, more negatively judged Black women employment candidates with Afrocentric hair. This gender effect did not emerge for White or Black women employment candidates with Eurocentric hair. The study findings suggest that Black women with Afrocentric hair may be disadvantaged in an employment context if men are making or influencing employment decisions.

General Discussion

Organizations often manage employee appearance so that employees present a professional image to clients and contribute to a positive organizational image. Yet, organizations may not consider the fact that appearance policies emanate from the convergence of cultural notions of professionalism and power dynamics (e.g., the business suit's origin in the European royal court in the seventeenth century, later worn by members of the elite class). It is those who are in power within a particular culture who define what is professional, create appearance policies to support this definition, and determine punishment for those who violate notions of professionalism (Joseph & Alex, 1972). In this way, appearance policies perpetuate extant power structures by rewarding those who conform to biased appearance norms and disadvantaging those who violate these norms. Given the increasingly diverse workplace, culturally biased appearance policies may create negative consequences for employees who deviate from cultural appearance norms, or even for employees who conform to the policies but do so involuntarily (Hewlin, 2003).

Appearance is a visible indicator of employee authenticity; thus, it is advisable for organizations to consider how appearance policies may thwart employee authenticity. Specifically, I encourage organizational leaders to consider both the necessity and the content of appearance policies. First, are appearance

policies necessary? To answer this question, organizational leaders can investigate the extent to which appearance policies positively influence employees' ability to perform their jobs. This requires that organizations actively monitor employees to determine if there is in fact a positive relationship between appearance policy adherence and employee performance. Further, how do employees, clients, and organizational cultures fare in organizations with lax or no appearance policies? Overall, organizational leaders are encouraged to actively engage with their employees and clients to determine if the appearance policies help employees and the firm.

Second, organizational leaders should consider the content of appearance policies as elements of appearance policies may negatively affect particular demographic groups (Opie, 2016). For example, firms may require that female employees wear high heels; however, this may be problematic because the appearance policy only applies to women. Further, high heels may be dangerous as they can cause physical harm, impede mobility, and hinder comfort (Lee, Jeong, & Freivalds, 2001; Linder & Saltzman, 1998; Simonsen et al., 2012). Or, firms may have appearance policies that require "sleek" hair; however, such a policy would burden employees with hair textures that are not naturally sleek. Additionally, procedures used to obtain "sleek" hair (e.g., chemical relaxers) have been found to have adverse effects (Shetty, Shetty, & Nair, 2013) and to be associated with more severe medical ailments (Wise, Palmer, Reich, Cozier, & Rosenberg, 2012). This may help to explain why an increasing number of Black women are opting to wear their natural hair (Mintel, 2017). This suggests that it is time for organizations to broaden norms of professionalism to include natural hair. The United States Army recently changed its appearance policies to allow natural hairstyles (Rhodan, 2014), as well as beards and turbans for religious reasons (Lopez, 2017). Hopefully, other organizations will follow suit. Another example is that firms may require all employees to wear formal business attire, without giving much thought to the fact that larger sized employees may prefer alternative professional attire because formal business suits may be uncomfortable (Barry, 2015) given that contemporary suits are based on historical designs tailored for the "normal" body (David, 2007). Thus, organizations are encouraged to actively monitor whether or not the content of their appearance policies place unfair burdens on, or even harm, employees who may deviate from Eurocentric, masculine, heteronormative norms of professionalism.

Overall, from a human resource management perspective, the current research implores organizations to actively question their appearance policies and examine whether or not such policies are worth it.

Given that authenticity is positively associated with enhanced commitment, satisfaction, and creativity, is it worth it for organizations to have appearance policies that may thwart authenticity?

Finally, organizational leaders can model authentic behaviour. Employees may feel more comfortable expressing their authenticity via appearance if they, for example, observe organizational leaders donning bolder dress that reflects their authentic personalities (Opie & Freeman, 2017). Given the current research findings, it may be helpful for organizational leadership to provide educational materials about the benefit of authenticity in the workplace and share insights about how seemingly innocuous appearance policies may thwart authenticity, thereby hindering employee engagement.

While this research is an important step in exploring employee authenticity and appearance policies, it does have several limitations. First, the study was a hypothetical hiring scenario that may lack realism. However, the study results suggest that a mere picture of an employment candidate is sufficient to generate the effects of interest. Second, the study was not conducted in a particular firm or industry, precluding the ability to examine the role of context. Future research should consider how organizational context may influence ratings of professionalism of individuals who deviate from Eurocentric norms of professionalism. For

example, it is possible that members of the "creative class" (e.g., fashion, marketing, advertising, the arts, etc.) may have broader conceptions of professionalism and may even reward employees who deviate from Eurocentric norms of professionalism. It is expected that firms and industries that are more conservative (e.g., Wall Street) may be less accepting of employee appearances that deviate from organizational norms.

In conclusion, organizations that encourage employee authenticity and that desire to create diverse and inclusive cultures may want to revisit their appearance policies. Globally, men comprise the majority of decision-making positions in organizations (Catalyst, 2016a, 2017), making the current study's findings particularly troublesome. If men are biased against Afrocentric hairstyles, this does not bode well for Black women who don Afrocentric hairstyles in the workplace. Further, if the bias against Afrocentric hairstyles reflects a broader bias against appearances that deviate from Eurocentric norms, the study findings have implications for diverse employees, such as those with different gender identities and sexual orientations (Warkander, 2014), religious backgrounds (King & Ahmad, 2010), or body sizes (Almond, 2013).

To reiterate, the overarching argument of the current research is not that authenticity has to be defined in a particular way (i.e., that for Black women, natural hair = authentic and Eurocentric hair = inauthentic). Rather, the critical takeaway is that employee authenticity is enhanced when employees are free to express themselves via their appearance however they desire to express themselves. Yet, employees who deviate from Eurocentric norms of professionalism may feel compelled to suppress their authentic identity expression to conform to organizational appearance policies. Organizations must ask if they are willing to cling to appearance policies, potentially suppressing employee authenticity and losing valuable employees. Or, are employers willing to examine their appearance policies to ensure that they facilitate a diverse and inclusive workplace where all employees are free to be authentic?

The fields of fashion studies and management studies alike could benefit from future research that extends the current conversation beyond Black women's natural hair. Even within the domain of hair, it is important to consider types of hair that have

not yet been explored. Specifically, future research might examine how organizational appearance policies regulate other hair types, such as armpit hair, gray hair, and facial hair.

Beyond hair, future research could examine how organizational appearance policies might thwart authentic identity expression related to religion (e.g., discouraging certain kinds of religious garb at work), weight (e.g., penalizing employees of larger body size at work), or gender orientation (e.g., expecting employees to dress in a way where their birth-assigned gender matches their bodies and their personal identities).

The examination of organizational appearance policies may be a fruitful endeavor as scholars in fashion studies and management strive to better understand the relationship between employee appearance and employee authenticity in the workplace.

Finally, the current research encourages scholars and organizations to consider how honest critique of organizational appearance policies may facilitate employees' authenticity and help organizations achieve the many benefits of employee authenticity.

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Dr. Tina Opie is an Assistant Professor in the Management Division at Babson College and has taught organizational behaviour courses to undergraduates and MBA students.

Dr. Opie's research focuses on how organizations and individuals can co-create workplaces that successfully leverage individual difference, convey respect for individuals' unique identities and contributions, and encourage authenticity in the workplace. The overarching goal of Dr. Opie's research is to acknowledge historical inequities and provide action-oriented solutions to redress these historical inequities.

Dr. Opie is a valued media contributor, appearing on shows about topics as diverse as identity, natural hair in the workplace, the political landscape, the #MeToo movement, and sexual harassment. She is also the founder of hairasidentity.com and naturalhairatwork.com.

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