

Paradigms: A Research Journal of Commerce, Economics and Social Sciences
ISSN 1996-2800, 2011, Vol. 5, No. 1, pp. 32-48.
DOI: 10.24312/paradigms050103

Examination of Ethnic and Policy Issues in Grooming Preferences and Ethnic Hairstyles of African American Women in Corporate America

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Abstract

For a century, college-trained, professional racial minorities: specifically, African American women with a preference in grooming methods have contributed to the labor market; however, in the new millennium, they are often discriminated against, scoffed at, isolated, and demoralized based on ethnic hairstyles. Research studies have distinguished a depth of research on this and conversely there are limited studies on racial minorities, in particular among grooming preferences in ethnic hairstyles. Studies have shown that in progressive companies, racial minorities and African American women who wear ethnic hairstyles had their employment terminated with prejudice. With regard to these case studies and findings, one could argue that in this nation there is freedom of speech and inequality in expression. For this reason, this research is very necessary to discover variables in ethnic and policy issues in grooming preferences with regard to the ethnic hairstyles of African American women as it relates to employers, whereat cohesive practices in diversity and policies address imposing construct in the labor market. This research will not address every ethnical concern in the labor market; yet, it responds to a call in the literature to define managerial deficiencies against racial minorities: in particular, African American women in grooming preferences.

JWL Code: M20, M21, M38

Key words: African American Women; Hair Grooming; Corporate America; Ethnic Policy.

INTRODUCTION

For a century, college-trained, professional racial minorities: specifically, African American women with a preference in grooming methods have contributed to the labor market; however, in the new millennium, they are often discriminated against, scoffed at, isolated, and demoralized based on ethnic hairstyles as described by Rosette & Dumas

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Statement of the Problem

Racial minorities and African American women in particular have lost a part of their cultural identity in rejection of ethnic hairstyles. Ethnic hairstyles are forbidden in the labor market based on employer's requirements to reconcile assimilation. Racial minorities and African American women have struggled for generations to reclaim their power and cultural identity in professional imagery; the central question here is does hair matter enough to constitute cultural identity? The essences of ethnic hairstyles have graced different social groups, throughout generations: however, only African American women face unique challenges (e.g., managerial biases, and stereotypes) in the labor market. These challenges raise the question: do corporate leaders have the professional fortitude and aptitude to look beyond biases and stereotypes to promote true diversity in hiring, and promotions over political skills against African American women in the labor market? Through this examination, variables are determined.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to provide employers with data to aid in the development of grooming policies related to improving (1) the perception of leadership deficiencies and processes, (2) the hiring and development practices based upon hair grooming, and (3) to examine the Title VII & EEO Standards in grooming preferences. Title VII & EEO Standards prevents employment discrimination; yet, this doctrine does not prevent the bias of people who have worn an ethnic hairstyle in the workplace.

This synthesis may provide data on the cognitive and non-cognitive dissonance variables in grooming policies and relations between racial minorities and African American women's cultural identity; furthermore, increased awareness, knowledge, and understanding for managers, proprietors, staff, clients, and customers may occur as a result.

This study is intended for companies who will consider cognitive dissonance and non-cognitive dissonance variables in ethnicity and policy issues in hair grooming of racial minorities and African American women in the labor market, as they plan diversity and affirmative action programs that involve hair grooming.

Research Questions

1. What are the perceptions among people who have presumably worn ethnic hairstyles and are discrimination against based on their ethnic hairstyles?
2. What are the perceptions among people who have presumably worn ethnic hairstyles and stigmatized characteristics of African American women based on ethnic hairstyles, which call into question their professionalism and competence?
3. What are the perceptions among people who have presumably worn ethnic hairstyles and political policies and misnomers that advance non-minority women though they may be less competent than African American women?

African American woman in corporate America wearing a well-maintained ethnic hairstyle is placed in an audacious predicament to challenge grooming policies as discriminatory at the intersection of race and gender. The intersection of race and gender is the social and systemic processes that isolate an individual based on their cultural identity, as defined by Crenshaw (1995). The central questions are where is the inception of (Title VII & EEO) civil rights for African American women? Here we can debate the complexities about business necessity, conformity, and white male ideology of an African American woman's countenance to remove arduous and luxurious hairstyles (e.g. braids); yet, the pervasive reoccurring theme is bigotry. Furthermost scholars characterize bigotry as intolerance and prejudicial acts against a person, or group. The injustice of bigotry against African American women are methods used to coerce them into "negotiating the presentation of their racial identity," and then forced to "compensate for both their gender and race in an effort to present a professional image that will render them credible to their co-workers," as described by Hamermesh and Biddle (1994; Weitz, 2001).

Just as African American women, African American men deal with harsh criticisms for wearing ethnic hairstyles as well. Moreover, African American men are subjected to

corporate “no beard-grooming policies.” Consider this: The Eleventh Circuit Court ruled safety reasons in its judgment (*Fitzpatrick v. City of Atlanta*, 1993)⁴, to permit fire departments usage of a “no-beard grooming policy.” Through this decision, the court found that African American men’s facial hair inhibits the use of respirator gear (Bandsuch, 2009). Sequentially, the court refused to concede on disparate impact experienced by Blacks due to Pseudo-Folliculitis Barbae (PFB), or austere shaving bumps, which disproportionately affect African American men, as explained by Admantis (2000). The decision proved reasonable, until the court equated “business necessity” with an important business goal, as described by Bandsuch (2009). The problem, the courts found “business necessity” (*Wards Cove Packing Co. v. Antonio*, 1989)⁵ more credible than medical inquiries that effect African American men.

There is no reference in the constitution for bigotry. The fact is, racial minorities and African American women question that their constitutional rights for freedom of speech against racial prejudices in grooming policies –a special amalgam that Caucasian, Asian, and Hispanic women are not required to emulate, as defined by Onwauchi-Willig (2010). The fact is Caucasian, Asian and Hispanic women’s immunity stems from their hair texture. The point is Caucasian, Asian, and Hispanic women are not subjugated to managerial stereotypes or biases because of hair. In fact, society would protest the imposition of grooming policies that marginalized, demonized, and demoralized Caucasian, Asian, and Hispanic women. The fact is “antidiscrimination case law imposes requirements” on African American “women by upholding implicit demands that they straighten their hair and then” maintain “that hairstyle through various abnormal processes,” as described by Onwauchi-Willig (2010, p. 1082).

⁴*Fitzpatrick v. City of Atlanta*, 2 F.3d 1112, 1112 (11th Cir, 1993).

⁵*Wards Cove Packing Co. v. Antonio*, 490 U. S. 642, 659 (1989) “Business necessity.”

LEGAL CASES

To illustrate the complexities associated with hairstyle preferences for African American women in corporate America described by Bandsuch (2009), consider the following permissible cases: the plaintiff, an African American woman in *McManus v. MCI Communications Corp* (2000),⁶ argued that wearing her hair in braids, dreadlocks, and African attire were a constitutional right. Sequentially, the court did not agree and her employment termination was upheld because she challenged a “no hair braids or African attire” corporate policy. Likewise, in *Rogers v. American Airlines, Inc.* (1981)⁷ the plaintiff, an African American woman, contested a corporate policy prohibiting employees in certain employment categories from wearing an all-braided hairstyle.

As a result, the court upheld a company decision to terminate Rogers. Similarly, the plaintiff, an African American woman in *Hollis v. Atlantis Company* (1999)⁸, challenged the company policy, which prohibited the wearing of “finger waves” hairstyles, later she argued the policy to be discriminatory, and as a result the court upheld the company’s position to terminate employment.

Internalized Racism

The capitulation of these court cases proposes the visible inception to internalized racialism in the labor market. Internalized racialism is the subjugation of the victims of racism to the mystifications by racist ideology that imprison and consistently define the oppressed (Pyke, 2010; Hall, 1986) sequentially reproduced by the oppressed (Pyke, 2010, p. 552). The legal cases presented in this document raise the, question: are racial minorities and African American women to think themselves equal to other groups? In lieu of the earlier multicultural paradigms that suggested racial minorities and African American women were inferior to other ethnicities; African American women are uncomfortable with their Blackness (Vandiver, Fhagen-Smith, Cross, & Worrell, 2001). Is it just for racial minorities and African American women to become subjugated to the relegation of bigotry based on

⁶*McManus v. MCI Communications Corp.* 748 A.2d 949,952 (D.C. 2000).

⁷*Renee Rogers v American Airlines, Inc.*, 527 F. SUPP. 229 (1981).

⁸*Hollis v. Atlantis Company.* 188 F.3d, 655-57 (6th Cir. 1999).

grooming preferences in the labor market? In contrast, Cokely (2002) hypothesized internalized racialism is identifying with negative stereotypes, and then internalizing those behaviors about oneself or racial groups. He reported there are no indications that racial minorities and African American women though they were apathetic to another ethnic group. Cokely stated African American women want to be completely dedicated to their culture without considering other cultures values or beliefs, and to be proud of their racial identity – to wear their hair naturally without repercussions. Yoshino (2002) postulated, “If one has a right to be something, one has the right to do the things that one feels are part of their identity.” Otherwise, “the demand to cover (e.g., assimilate)...becomes the symbolic heartland of inequality that reassures one group of its superiority to the next.”

Context of the Background

Historically, there have been an obsession over African American women’s natural hair characteristics in grooming preference that ultimately have produced a number of outcomes, some of which include other co-workers’ judgment of their professionalism, competence, intelligence, trustworthiness, and sociality, as defined by Berscheid and Walster (1974). As an appraisal, these judgments have a particularly profound impact on African American women in the labor market, as described by Dipboye, Arvey and David (1977). Conversely, social science research has shown that racial minorities and African American women m el ee over constructing this professional image due to their natural hair characteristics, and cultural values that reward Caucasian male standards of behavior (Alvesson& Billing, 1997) in grooming. More importantly, these types of judgments affect hiring decisions and other critical work outcomes. In sum, racial minorities and African American women are au fait with the importance of projecting a professional image at work and the significance that grooming preferences symbolize in constructing that image successfully, as defined by Rosette and Dumas (2007).

UNEMPLOYMENT STATISTICS

This research seeks to discover the variables associated with unemployment statistics based on gender, ethnicities and women over 20 years old in the United States. More

specifically, to establish the veracity and validity in unemployment reporting for racial minorities and African American women based on grooming preferences.

The Percentage of Women by reason for Unemployment and Ethnicity includes data highlighting unemployment (unadjusted v. seasonal adjustments insured claims files) of women 20 years and over in 2010, whereas 13.2 percentage points of African American women in the unadjusted insured claims category were unemployed in August. In July, 12.9 percentage points were unemployed. Compared to July 2009, 13.9 percentage points had received extended insured unemployed. African American women were the highest group unemployed. In contrast, the insured unemployed seasonal unadjusted category in August 2009, 11.4 percentage points of unemployed; compare to 13.7 percentage points unemployed in 2010; whereas Caucasian women 7.1 percentage points, Hispanic women 8.0, and Asian 0.0 respectfully.

Table 1 Percentage of Women by reason for Unemployment and Ethnicity includes data highlighting unadjusted insured unemployment rates from August 2004 through August 2009. By August 2010, 7.2 percentage points is the average total of unemployment for Caucasian women, Hispanic women 8.0 percentage points, Asian women 0.0 percentage points, and African American women 12.7 percentage points. From the data between 2004 and 2009, it appears that African American women were the largest group to receive extended insured unemployment in the United States. In 2010, the data illustrate that African American women were also the largest group to receive extended insured unemployment in United States. Base on the Percentage of Women by reason for Unemployment and Ethnicity in 2009 and 2010, the central question, is it reasonable to assume that grooming preferences in ethnic hairstyles are attributing factors in industrialized stereotyping? Industrialized stereotyping is the influence on hiring decisions as defined by Iikka (1995), slanted by societal interpretations of what is attractive.

TABLE 1

Percentage of Women by reason for Unemployment, and Ethnicity 20 Years and Over: U.S.
Bureau of Labor and Statistics

2010								
Seasonal Unadjusted	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug
Caucasian	6.8	7.3	7.3	7.4	7.4	7.1	7.1	7.1
African American	13.3	11.8	11.7	12.9	12.0	11.7	14.3	14.1
Hispanics	7.9	8.0	8.0	8.2	8.1	7.8	7.9	8.0

Note. adapted from U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Percentage of Women by reason for Unemployment, and Ethnicity 20 Years and Over Selected 2009 & 2010: In the Labor Force Statistics including the National Unemployment Rate [On-Line], Available: <http://www.bls.gov/data/>

Assuming ethnic hairstyles were not legitimately germane to employment opportunities; is it less arguable that stereotypes in grooming preferences exist (Iikka, 1995). One might wonder how discrimination could be so robust against several decades of legal organizational and attitudinal reform, as defined by Cortina (2008). The central question: are affirmative action and antidiscrimination laws efficient? Conceptually, the social and political landscape has shifted toward newer forms of racism and discrimination (Deitch et al., 2003, p. 1300). McConahay's states:

The principal tenets of modern racism are these: (1) Discrimination is outdated because Blacks now have the freedom to compete in the marketplace and enjoy those things they can afford. (2) Blacks are pushing too hard, too fast, and into places where they are not wanted. (3) These tactics and demands are unfair. (4) Therefore, recent gains are undeserved and the prestige granting institutions of society are giving Blacks more attention and the concomitant status than they deserve (1986: 92-93).

African American Women and Equal Opportunity

Literature is replete with examples of what has enabled African American women to succeed in industries. Darity and Mason (1998) reported affirmative action and antidiscrimination laws have secured employment, subverted wage discrimination, and impelled African American women in American industries, as described by Grodsky and Pager (2001), in particular at the highest levels, where power is most concentrated, as defined by Benokraitis et al., (1997). More so, affirmative action and antidiscrimination laws have cultivated a set of leaders with legitimacy in the eyes of the citizenry, it is necessary that the path to leadership be visibly open to talented and qualified individuals of every race and ethnicity (Supreme Court majority opinion in Grutter v. Bollinger, 2003). There has been employment proliferation in industries from the military to the federal government to Fortune 1000 companies (Dovidio, Gaertner, & Bachman, 2001). In 2010, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) received 99,922 complaints of employment discrimination.

The Center for Women Policy, in 2001, investigated the efficacy of affirmative action and antidiscrimination laws, and surveyed over one thousand racial minorities and African American women in 16 Fortune 1000 companies. Succinctly, forty-seven percent of Native American women, fifty percent of African American women and one third of Latinas and Asian American women reported prejudicial treatment. Over-all eighty percent believed that, they had to soften their racial and cultural characteristics not to outrival their counterparts. The central question: is between 2001 and 2010 what affirmative action and antidiscrimination laws changed?

Annual Earnings

There has been research on the growing disparity between social groups. Bernhardt et al., (2001) identified trends on wage inequality by education between men and women, wage differences by family structure, as defined by Budig and England (2001) and growing inequality by occupation, as described by Autor, Katz and Kearney (2004). Further, findings exposed inequality in employment opportunities, equate lower levels of education fulfilment, marital variability, and concentration in nonprofessional/nontechnical jobs, as defined by

Pettit and Ewert (2009). In contrast, researchers found discrimination facilitated the poor economic outcomes for racial minorities and African American women (Cancio, Evans, &Maume, 1996; Kim 2002) in the labor market.

TABLE 2

Percentage of Women by reason for Unemployment, and Ethnicity 20 Years and Over: U.S.
Bureau of Labor and Statistics 2003-2010

	Caucasian	African American	Hispanics	Asian
Year	August			
2003	4.9	10.1	5.7	6.3
2004	4.4	9.1	5.0	3.3
2005	4.1	8.5	4.7	3.7
2006	3.9	7.4	4.4	2.9
2007	4.1	6.6	4.5	3.4
2008	5.3	9.4	5.8	4.2
2009	7.7	12.5	8.3	6.7
2010	7.7	14.1	8.6	6.7

As illustrated in Table 2, the earnings gap is particularly significant for both African American men and African American women. African American women earned 61.9 percentage points for every dollar earned by Caucasian males; Hispanic women earned only 52.9 percentage points for each dollar earned by Caucasian males. Comparatively, Asian Americans high earnings are related to traditionally high rates of education accomplishments, although, in this illustration gender gaps remain 82.3 percentage points. (Institute for Women's Policy Research Compilation of Current Population Survey Labor Force Statistics, 2009)

Educational Achievement

As measured by research studies on the need of achievement Monk (1998), in the African American community, evidence has underscored the eminence of African Americans'

enrollment in higher education. Wherein statistical measures of performance in higher education is that of how many African American women and men have completed school and earned a college degree. (Blacks in Higher Education)

- Bachelor's degrees in 2006-2007: 96,968 (6.4% of those getting BA's) compared to 49,685 African American men (3.3%).
- Master's degrees in 2006-2007: 44,667 (7.4% of those getting MA's) compared to 17,907 African American men (3.0%).
- Doctoral degrees in 2006-2007: 2,445 (4.0% of those getting PhDs) compared to 1,282 African American men (2.1%) (National Center for Education Statistic, 2009)

Finally, researchers' have concluded that social and economic disparities attribute to affirmative action and antidiscrimination policy (Pettit, 2005) administration. The central question is: what processes will call for appropriate policy administration to neutralize new forms of anti-minority bigotry in grooming preferences? New forms of anti-minority bigotry in grooming preferences are pervasively ambiguous, so much that instigators are oblivious of its discriminatory nature, and they characteristically have lucid, non-discriminatory explanations for their conduct, as defined by Cortina (2008).

Contextually Relevant Optimal Mix

Clearly, leaders in the labor market operate within a larger society/culture, which certainly affects the unfolding of discrimination (Cortina, 2008, p. 61). Even so, leaders must define issues in grooming policies, to impede maladministration of affirmative action and antidiscrimination policies, and bigotry in grooming preferences. Synthesizing and integrating processes in grooming policies will facilitate an optimal mix. There are several principles to procure an optimal mix: (1) Define language in grooming policies, so as not to impose insensitive demands on racial minorities, and African American women based on ethnic hairstyles. (2) Define subordinate and non-subordinate goals to redefine corporate grooming policies that give it a reasonable chance of achieving its purpose. (3) Define sustainable vision that is free of stereotypical behaviors' –equated with interpersonal biases.

LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS

Limitations

This study will not address every unethical or ethical concern in corporate America; however, it looks to define managerial deficiencies in stereotypes and biases against racial minorities and African American women in hair grooming.

The limitations have sets of parameters based on the design of this study, to interpret findings; that is, general constraints and the effectiveness of results used to understand the validity of this investigation. Results based on; for example:

1. Racial minorities and African American women who have worn ethnic hairstyles in corporate America as opposed to African American women who have faced negative opposition based on grooming preferences.
2. African American women who have never worn ethnic hairstyles in corporate America as opposed to African American women who maintain feelings against those that do wear ethnic hairstyles in the workplace.
3. African American women who have never worn ethnic hairstyles in corporate America as opposed to African American women who have worn ethnic hairstyles in corporate America.

This study intends to underline general experienced behaviors in grooming preferences of African American women in corporate America. However, where the null hypothesis is false, a random sample of subjects who work in other industries (education, social work, retail, etc.) that were not included in the study will be analyzed, assuming the sample is large enough to provide for a random selection. Finally, this study intends to draw a descriptive or inferential conclusion from sample data that solely depends on participation.

Delimitations

The characteristics that limit the scope of the inquiry include exclusionary and inclusionary factors. Exclusionary factors were “not to study” too large of a sample population (e.g., International Greek Letter Organizations of College Trained Women) ranging up to ten thousands. Whereas inclusionary factors were to narrow the study scope to

a more manageable sample population location in the Mid-west region: Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Kentucky, Wisconsin and Ohio.

CONCLUSION

This study is intended for those interested in including personnel from levels of business other than their own as they plan diversity and affirmation action programs. There are associations of cognitive dissonance and non-cognitive dissonance variables to achieve grooming standards at multiple levels of industry that include entry, mid-management, and senior levels of supervision.

In summary, the results of this investigation are intended for use by shared decision-makers interested in developing diversity and affirmation action programs for improving corporate relations. The results of this study have implications for ethnic and policy changes and change in grooming policies for racial minorities and African American women.

This study is not esoteric, for it is intended for authentic people who are interested in improving and sustaining corporate relations in the labor market of racial minorities and African American women. This study is a base for further research in appearance strategy of racial minorities and African American women in corporate America.

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