

(Don't) Let your hair down: the role model influence on black women's adoption of beauty standards

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Resumo

In addition to the multiple types of prejudice historically encountered by black people in general, black women also suffer discrimination on the grounds of image and beauty. Intimately connected to their social identity, this prejudice permeates many aspects of their lives, including consumption choices and willingness to steer clear from black standards to follow white beauty standards. One markedly known practice along these lines refers to the use of chemicals to straighten the curly hair black women naturally have. However, role models in the form of ingroup women in power position can be a way to disconfirm the negative stereotypes black women hold about themselves and thereby reduce this widespread practice. This article sheds light on the effect of role model and stereotype threat on black women's adoption of an ingroup beauty standard (i.e., choice of a curly or kinky hair product set). Results of an online experiment provide evidence for the positive effect of role model on the decision to choose an ingroup product. Importantly, this effect is moderated by stereotype threat such that role model exerts greater influence on ingroup product choice when threats are salient. Implications for practice and future research are also discussed.



(DON'T) LET YOUR HAIR DOWN: THE ROLE MODEL INFLUENCE ON BLACK WOMEN'S ADOPTION OF BEAUTY STANDARDS

Abstract

In addition to the multiple types of prejudice historically encountered by black people in general, black women also suffer discrimination on the grounds of image and beauty. Intimately connected to their social identity, this prejudice permeates many aspects of their lives, including consumption choices and willingness to steer clear from black standards to follow white beauty standards. One markedly known practice along these lines refers to the use of chemicals to straighten the curly hair black women naturally have. However, role models in the form of ingroup women in power position can be a way to disconfirm the negative stereotypes black women hold about themselves and thereby reduce this widespread practice. This article sheds light on the effect of role model and stereotype threat on black women's adoption of an ingroup beauty standard (i.e., choice of a curly or kinky hair product set). Results of an online experiment provide evidence for the positive effect of role model on the decision to choose an ingroup product. Importantly, this effect is moderated by stereotype threat such that role model exerts greater influence on ingroup product choice when threats are salient. Implications for practice and future research are also discussed.

Introduction

Discrimination against black individuals has been constructed throughout history. Implications of these discriminatory practices, research shows, can be far-reaching. One domain that is directly impacted by our Eurocentric standpoint is the body image, as it is highly connected to culture (Fallon, 1990). Although women, in general, suffer from a great societal pressure with respect to their attractiveness (Lerner, Karabenick & Stuart, 1973), African American women also face an additional burden associated with their race (Neal & Wilson, 1989; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008).

As part of the physical appearance, the hair plays an important role in the life of women of color (Johnson & Bankhead, 2014). A proximity to white standards, such as straight hair, can be decisive when it comes to reaching both economic and social success (Hughes & Hertel, 1990; Okazawa-Rey, Robinson & Ward, 1987). Hence, hair is not only a matter of appearance for black people, but it is also intrinsically connected to how others will treat them and therefore how they feel about themselves (Thompson, 2009).

Hair is an important part of many black women identity (Patton, 2006), and it is also a usual cause of distress for this group. Nevertheless, role models in the form of outstanding ingroup members help people maintain a positive image of their group even in the presence of threats to their social identities (Marx & Roman, 2002). Along similar lines, although people undergoing an identity threat might look to steer clear from the threatened identity (Pan, Pettit, Sivanathan, & Blader, 2014) and try to adopt the dominant group standards (Corneo & Jeanne, 1997), we believe that the presence of a role model can shift this scenario. Precisely, we hypothesize that the presence of a role model will increase ingroup product consumption among black women, as it makes them feel better equipped to cope with threats to their social identity. Thus, yet role models might exert a dramatic influence in various different scenarios, it is expected to gain importance when people are exposed to threatening situations.

While there are there are studies investigating the effect of a role model on psychological outcomes, less is known about its effects on the adoption of ingroup standards. This study investigates the effect of role models on black women's consumption of beauty products intimately connected to their social identities in both identity-threatening and non-threatening contexts. Through an online experiment, we contribute to the literature by examining an underexplored effect and presenting a consequential implication of role models, namely the choice of a beauty product.

The beauty standards and black women

Body image consists of how we see and perceive ourselves and how we think that others see us. According to Fallon (1990), "the body is experienced as a reflection of the self". The concept of body image is highly connected to the culture and the societal definition of what is desirable and attractive. Therefore, the body image also contains the perception of the cultural standards, the perception to the extent that this standard is matched by the individual, and the perception of the importance that members of the cultural group and the individual place on that match (Fallon, 1990). Also, concerns about attractiveness and the very concept of women are to a large extent associated with their body image, which does not necessarily occur with their male counterparts (Lerner, Karabenick & Stuart, 1973).

When we focus on black beauty, we face a historical issue on the development of the standards. "Throughout their history, black women in the U.S. have confronted two often conflicting standards of beauty, one suggested by the majority white culture and one consistent with their African American heritage" (Makkar & Strube, 1995). The same conflict can be observed in Brazil and other places with a predominantly Eurocentric culture around the world. In countries like these, where so many people self-identify as black but, so few black people reach high-status positions, following a white beauty standard can make all the difference (Gatewood, 1988). In fact, research shows that a proximity to white standards (e.g., having light skin and straight hair) can—and often does—translate into an enhanced likelihood of thriving both economically and socially (Hughes & Hertel, 1990; Okazawa-Rey, Robinson & Ward, 1987).

The history of slavery and Eurocentric domination leads not only to prejudice from others, but also to a general sense of disliking of black people towards their own blackness (Hill, 2002; Robinson, 2011). Although black individuals suffer from negative stereotypes (Davidson, 2007; Eberhardt, Goff, Purdie, & Davies, 2004; Gibbs, 1973; Stone, Lynch, Sjomeling, & Darley, 1999), black women suffer even harder from these biases against African Americans when it comes to attractiveness (Neal & Wilson, 1989).

Notions of black beauty and black inferiority are inextricably bound (Patton, 2006), placing naturally kinky hair textures as low on beauty continuums (Robinson, 2011). In the past, there was a so-called "comb test" for "good hair", which required a hair texture to be straight enough to pass easily through an ordinary comb (Okazawa-Rey, Robinson & Ward, 1987; Bond & Cash, 1992). This concept of a "good hair" is purely based on the Eurocentric standards, and this ideal for Americans is a soft to touch, wavy or straight, and that does not require much products or interventions (MacFarlane, Tropp, & Goff, 2017). Therefore, it is possible to notice that the use of the word "kinky" or the ideal of a "good hair" (in opposite to others being a "bad hair") bears negative associations due to an implicit deviation from the established standard (Lester, 2000).

Furthermore, besides aesthetics and style, hair can be a badge of cultural pride and used as a way to maintain or go against the status quo. Black women "use hair as a medium to understand complex identity politics that intersect along the lines of race,

gender, class, sexuality, power, and beauty” (Banks, 2000). In view of this, hair is not only a matter of appearance for blacks, but something that has the power to dictate how others will treat them, and in turn, how blacks feel about themselves (Thompson, 2009). Therefore, for many black Americans, perceptions of “the lightness of their skin, the broadness of their nose, the thickness of their lips, and the kinkiness of their hair” have vital importance to their perceived self-worth, intelligence, success, and attractiveness (Neal & Wilson, 1989). By recognizing the link between ones’ hair and ones’ identity (Hunt & McHale, 2005) and the negative stereotypes that devalue hair textures (Robinson, 2011), more vulnerable black individuals may deem necessary displaying an apparent proximity with the dominant group (i.e., the white).

While hair may play an essential role in the lives of people of all races, the grooming and styling of hair have particular importance for social rituals in African cultures (Johnson & Bankhead, 2014). Hence, hair valuations become especially threatening for people of African descent because on top of the unique nature and texture of black hair, the centrality of hair to African American people strengthens the link between their identity and hair presentation (Patton, 2006). It ultimately induces the juxtaposition of black beauty against white beauty standards (Patton, 2006) and disproportionately burden blacks relative to whites. Women of color, in particular, who are member of two stigmatized groups (i.e., black, women) (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008) and who place the hair in a more central role in their lives (Neal & Wilson, 1989), may be even more vulnerable to threats, displaying added interest in gaining some proximity with dominant groups.

The role of role models

Pushing women of color to become more satisfied with their ingroup appearance and less likely to adopt outgroup standards is of great importance, especially for countries such as Brazil and the US where almost 51% (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, 2011) and 14% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011) of the population self-describes as black, respectively.

Role models are a way of motivating minority group individuals to set and achieve ambitious goals, especially for members of stigmatized groups (Morgenroth, Ryan & Peters, 2015). They can have a profoundly positive impact on a person’s life because they are all perceived to be competent in their respective areas (Lockwood & Kunda, 1997), and ingroup members copy their positive aspects and exclude the negative ones (Collins, 1996; Javidan, Bemmels, Devine & Dastmalchian, 1995).

The role models may not even be aware of their part in this process and of having been chosen as role models by others (Fisher, 1988). However, they can lead to several positive outcomes, such as enhance self-evaluations and motivation (Blanton, Crocker & Miller, 2000; Lockwood, 2006; Gilbert, Gallessich & Evans, 1983; Lockwood, 2006; Major, Sciacchitano, & Crocker, 1993), being inspirational (Lockwood & Kunda, 1997; Tesser, 1986), and even enhance professional and academic aspirations (Boswell, 1985; Hackett, 1985; Marx & Roman, 2002).

Female role models in upscale-related domains might be particularly helpful for women of color because they represent threat-disconfirming evidence about black women’s inferior ability in upscale positions (Marx & Roman, 2002). Therefore, the benefits of having female role models in leadership positions may be considerable if one of the reasons that women of color are severely underrepresented in both in upscale or leadership positions is the presence of negative stereotypes. In the pages that follow we elaborate on the hypothesis that role models prompt black women to adopt their ingroup

beauty standards to a greater extent, particularly in contexts where stereotype threats are made salient.

The consequences of stereotype threat

According to Steele and Aronson (1995), stereotype threat is defined as “being at risk of confirming, as self-characteristic, a negative stereotype about one's group”. This theory posits that people that are part of a group that is stigmatized by a negative stereotype may underperform because of a concern of confirming this stereotype as self-characteristic (Pennington, Heim, Levy, & Larkin, 2016). For instance, these threats induce low-income individuals' behavior in intergroup settings (Spencer & Castano, 2007) and women math performance (Spencer, Steele & Quinn, 1999).

The literature has shown that physical appearance has an impact on many different outcomes, among them those related to the labor market (Hosoda, Stone-Romero & Coats, 2003), such as wages (Guéguen, 2012) or promotion decisions (Morrow, McElroy, Stamper & Wilson, 1990). Further, there is extensive evidence demonstrating that physical appearance is one common source of social stereotype (Adams, 1977; Pennington, Heim, Levy, & Larkin, 2016).

Although members of stigmatized groups may adopt certain strategies for self-protection under potentially threatening events (Crocker & Major, 1989) upward social comparisons to mainstream beauty standards may cause a person to feel negative about herself, bringing negative consequences for this group (Crocker & Major, 1989; Crocker, Major & Steele, 1998). Thus, believing on the negative image of ones' own appearance can lead to identity threats, which in turn cause increased anxiety and reduced performance in many situations where intergroup contact is necessary (Mikulincer, Gillath, & Shaver, 2002; Seacat & Mickelson, 2009; Spencer, Steele, & Quinn, 1999; Stone, Lynch, Sjomeling & Darley, 1999).

When it comes to consumer behavior, years of literature in compensatory and conspicuous consumption have documented multiple situations in which low socioeconomic status individuals try to adopt dominant groups' standards in an attempt to signal proximity with the desired group (Corneo & Jeanne, 1997). They range from purchases of upscale goods (Bentley et. al., 2017; Lee & Shrum, n.d.) to the adoption of the dominant groups' beauty patterns (Penner & Saperstein, 2013; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008).

Not only individuals rely on compensatory buying behavior, but also in distancing themselves from consuming particular goods associated with the threatened dimension of their social identities. Individuals show low-status aversion not only by purchasing compensatory items, but also by displaying great willingness to steer clear from items that reinforce that stereotype when experiencing threat, meaning lower intention to buy and higher intention to sell low-status goods (Pan, Pettit, Sivanathan, & Blader, 2014). By adopting upscale standards and avoiding negatively stereotyped ones, people perceive an achievement of higher social status, which lessens their anticipatory threat. They deem the possibility of being negatively evaluated according to stereotypes to be less likely to occur. White and Argo (2009) showed the effects of stereotype threat on consumption decisions, concluding that while people often use products that are consistent with who they are, when an aspect of their social identity is threatened, they become more likely to avoid products associated with aspects of their own identity.

Nevertheless, one of the known ways to diminish the effect of stereotype threat is the social comparisons with a person who is succeeding (Steele, Spencer & Aronson, 2002). Role models have been proven to be beneficial and have a positive impact on

reducing the adverse effect of stereotypes, particularly in situations where a negative stereotype about women's is made salient (Marx & Roman, 2002), and we will explore this relationship further on the next section.

Hypotheses

In the present work, we discuss how black women role models in upward positions protect their ingroup counterparts from the adverse effects of the race and gender stereotypes and affect their likelihood of adopting an ingroup beauty standard. Given the substantial negative consequences of the gender and racial stereotype on women of color, it seems sensible to identify ways to help them cope with the race-related adversities that permeate their social lives.

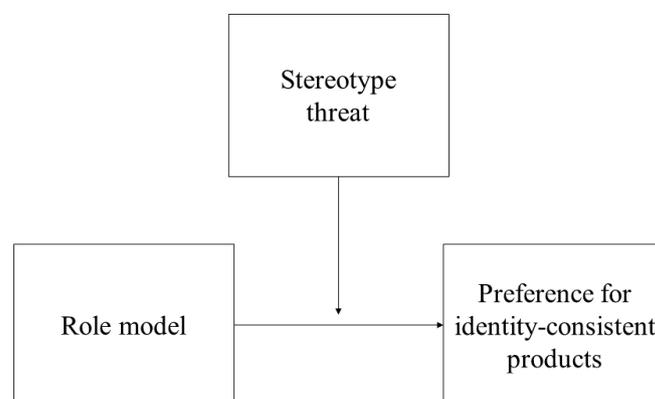
In this work, we argue that one way this may occur is by increasing the number of female role models in upscale domains. Having examples of black women who represent stereotype-disconfirming information serve as concrete demonstrations that black women can and do indeed succeed, despite all the prejudice faced over the life course. The sense of being able to achieve life aspirations, just as the role models did, may lead black women to adopt a more identity-congruent beauty standard. This would be reflected in consumption terms by the greater choice for hair products destined to their own social group relative to products targeted at white populations.

Nevertheless, we cannot disregard the effect of the prejudice encountered by women of color on a daily basis, which constantly threatens their social identity. We, therefore, predict not only a positive effect of role model on the adoption of ingroup beauty standards but also an exacerbation of this effect in contexts where stereotype threats become more prominent. This is because when negative stereotypes are made salient, people have a natural tendency to detach from the dimension of their social identity that is being threatened. We expect that by having role models they can resort to so as to maintain their self-image as valuable members of society, black women will not detach from their social group when making consumption decisions. Thus, formally:

H₁: The presence of a role model increases the likelihood of black women choosing a curly or kinky hair product set (i.e. ingroup product) over a straight or chemically treated hair product set (i.e. outgroup product).

H₂: The effect of role model on ingroup product choice (i.e., curly or kinky hair product set) will be strengthened when threats to black women's social identity are made salient.

Model: Hypothesized model



Experiment

Participants and Design

A group of black women took part in this 2 (role model: yes vs. no) by 2 (threat: yes vs. no) between-subjects study.

Participants were invited to participate through a Facebook ad. The ad was segmented in order to include respondents from all regions of Brazil, female, ranging from the age of 18 to 55, and with interests on hair straightening or afro-textured hair.

Brazil was chosen as the focus of this study because, as said before, the majority of its population is black, with over 50% of the people (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, 2011). Therefore, this matter is of the most importance, and it is relevant to observe this minority behavior despite being the largest group of people in the country.

A total of 1,311 questionnaires were collected. However, 184 observations were dropped due to missing values. Moreover, eight observations were dropped due to the respondent being a man and 525 for not being a black person. This led to a total of 594 valid observations of black women. The mean age of participants was 36.2 (SD = 10.5). Table 1 summarizes the descriptive statistics of the sample.

Considering that people would probably choose the hair product according to their current hairstyle, it is important to take this observable characteristic into consideration. Based on the respondents' answers to what kind of chemical treatment they usually use on their hair, we defined a variable that discriminates two groups in terms of hair straightening. This is a dummy variable where one was assigned to people that straighten or smoothen their hair and zero for others. It is important to notice that the use of laces and hair extensions are not usual in Brazil and were therefore not considered in this study. From our sample, 53.9% of the respondents used some sort of hair straightening product on their hair.

When looking into our dependent variable, we can observe that 41.6 % of participants chose the curly or kinky hair product set, while the remaining chose the straight or wavy hair product set.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

	Percentages
Education ^a (%)	
Up to some high school	22.9
High school completed	44.1
Some university degree or more	33
Income ^b (%)	
Up to R\$ 1,000	38.2
From R\$ 1,001 to R\$ 2,000	32.3
Above R\$ 2,001	29.5
Married ^c (%)	43.4
Straightened hair ^d (%)	53.9
Curly/Kinky Hair Product Set ^e (%)	41.6
N of obs.	594

Note: ^a Variable School level: 1 = up to some high school, 2 = complete high school and 3 = some university or higher level of education. ^b Variable Income: 1 = up to R\$ 1,000, 2 = from R\$ 1,001 to R\$ 2,000 and 3 = above R\$ 2,001. 11 participants chose not to inform their income and had their responses replaced by the mean. ^c Variable Marital status: 0 = unmarried and 1 = married. ^d Variable Hair straightening: 0 = natural hair and 1 = straightened hair. ^e Variable Hair product set: 0 = straight/wavy set and 1 = curly/kinky hair set.

Procedure

We distributed the experiment using Facebook Ads on an institutional university page created for this purpose. Subjects that chose to participate clicked on the ad and were taken to the experiment page. On this page, participants answered first to a socioeconomic questionnaire. After that, they proceeded to two tasks, presented as unrelated, on a random order. One of these tasks was used as the manipulation for the role model condition, and the other for the threat condition.

The role model condition task was portrayed as a memory assessment. As proposed by Dasgupta and Asgari (2004), on this task participants saw pictures and read a short text about women on power positions on the role model condition, and of different species of flowers on the control condition. Using multiple role model options, we believe we were able to heighten the possibility of a connection between the subject and one of the characters. This connection is essential, because it has been shown on the literature that the identification with the role model impacts on its effectiveness (Lockwood, 2006; Taylor, Lord, McIntyre, & Paulson, 2011; Marx & Ko, 2012). Next, participants were asked to answer three memory questions, connecting the pictures to the right description, from two options randomly presented.

On the threat condition task, participants were presented to one of two news articles excerpts. On the threat condition, the article was about the lack of representativeness of Black women and minorities in the fashion industry. As for the control condition, the article was just about trends from the latest runway shows. The use of news articles has been used as manipulation on stereotype threat literature and proven effective (i.e. White & Argo, 2009; White, Argo & Sengupta, 2012). In addition, participants had to answer a questionnaire about the fashion industry, thus maintaining the cover story.

Right after completing both tasks, participants read a small text stating that this study was sponsored by a beauty industry company and were asked to choose one option of hair product set to participate on a raffle. The options were either for chemically treated/straight hair (outgroup product) or kinky/curly hair (ingroup product). This choice was our main dependent variable of interest.

Finally, all participants answered a questionnaire with items about their hair, including their will to use their natural hair. Also, we included a measurement scale of perceived discrimination, adapted from Sandhu and Asrabadi (1994), focusing on perceived hair discrimination, with the questions “With my natural hair I could be treated differently than people who have other types of hair would be” and “I might not have what I deserve because of my hair”, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Although most previous work on this field used manipulations of the threat condition, Steele and Aronson (1995) have used a scale to assess subjects’ stereotype threat, and so have Roberson et al. (2003). Perceiving the self and their group as a target of discrimination harms one’s psychological well-being (Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009; Schmitt, Branscombe, Postmes & Garcia, 2014), also in studies focusing only on black

individuals (Broman, Mavaddat & Hsu, 2000; Thames et. al., 2013). As happens for stereotype threat, for minority groups, recognizing prejudice is painful (Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002). Considering that both stereotype threat and perceived discrimination are related to the prejudice against one's identity, we include the perceived discrimination scale to work as an alternative measure of the identity threat of respondents.

Randomization checks

As we can notice in Table 2, unexpectedly, there were unbalances between conditions on marital status and hairstyle.

Table 2: Balance statistics

	Threat Condition			Role Model Condition		
	No Threat	Threat Present	P-value	No Role Model	Role Model Present	P-value
Age (mean)	35.6	36.4	.63	35.8	36.6	.31
Education ^a (%)						
Up to some high school	21.7	23.9		24.6	21.2	
High school completed	44.6	43.7	.82	40.2	48.1	.15
Some university degree or more	33.7	32.4		35.2	30.7	
Income ^b (%)						
Up to R\$ 1,000	40.2	36.5		39.9	36.5	
From R\$ 1,001 to R\$ 2,000	33.0	31.8	.40	30.2	34.5	.52
Above R\$ 2,001	26.8	31.8		29.9	29.0	
Married ^c (%)	38.8	47.5	.03	39.5	47.4	.05
Straightened hair ^d (%)	57.2	50.9	.12	57.4	50.2	.07
N of obs.	276	318		301	293	

Note: Age was computed based on two-tailed t-test. The remaining were based on chi-2 test. ^a Variable School level: 1 = up to some high school, 2 = complete high school and 3 = some university or higher level of education. ^b Variable Income: 1 = up to R\$ 1,000, 2 = from R\$ 1,001 to R\$ 2,000 and 3 = above R\$ 2,001. 11 participants chose not to inform their income and had their responses replaced by the mean. ^c Variable Marital status: 0 = unmarried and 1 = married. ^d Variable Hair straightening: 0 = natural hair and 1 = straightened hair.

Although such unbalances are not expected to occur on average over repeated randomizations, they may happen on a specific study by chance. Thus, in order to control for this unbalance, we present results with and without covariates as robustness checks.

Results and discussion

We performed a series of logistic regressions to assess the direct and interaction effect of role model condition, threat condition, and perceived discrimination.

Threat and Role Model. In a logistic regression with the choice of the product set as the dependent variable [1=ingroup product, 0=outgroup product], and manipulated role

model and threat as predictors (Table 3), we observe a non-significant effect of threat on the likelihood of choosing the ingroup hair product set (Model 1: $\beta = 0.12$, $p = .49$). However, being exposed to role models increased the probability of choosing the ingroup hair product set (Model 1: $\beta = 0.33$, $p = .05$). After the inclusion of covariates (age, education, marital status, income and hair straightening), the effect of threat remains non-significant and, unexpectedly, the effect of role model also loses significance (model 2: $\beta = 0.27$, $p = .19$). This change in the coefficient is related to the unbalance observed between the role model conditions in terms of hair straightening, which is an important predictor of the choice of product set. As this covariate happens, by chance, to be correlated to the treatment the coefficients estimated in the model without this covariate are affected by omitted variable bias. Thus, we do not find robust empirical evidence to support H_1 .

Table 3: Logistic regression models

VARIABLES	Hair product set			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Role Model	0.332* (0.167)	0.269 (0.203)	0.425 (0.247)	0.442 (0.301)
Threat	0.116 (0.168)	0.0126 (0.205)	0.202 (0.239)	0.169 (0.287)
Role Model x Threat			-0.172 (0.336)	-0.319 (0.409)
<i>Controls</i>				
Age		0.003 (0.010)		0.003 (0.010)
School level		0.385* (0.151)		0.382* (0.151)
Marital status		-0.239 (0.214)		-0.230 (0.214)
Household income		0.0431 (0.136)		0.0434 (0.136)
Hair straightening		-2.526*** (0.207)		-2.534*** (0.207)
N of obs.	594	594	594	594

Note: Standard errors between parentheses. *** $p < 0.1\%$, ** $p < 1\%$, * $p < 5\%$

The interaction term between threat and role model was not significant without control variables (Model 3), as well as after their inclusion in the model (Model 4), thus not supporting H_2 when using the manipulated threat variable as moderator.

Perceived hair discrimination and Role model. We also tested the summated scale of perceived hair discrimination ($\alpha = 0.73$), as a proposed alternative to the threat manipulation.

In a logistic regression with choice of product set as the dependent variable [1=ingroup product, 0=outgroup product], the direct effect of both perceived discrimination (Model 5: $\beta = 0.24$, $p < .01$) and role model (Model 5: $\beta = 0.33$, $p = .05$) were significant (Table 4). However, when including control variables, the effect of the role model vanishes (Model 6), again not supporting H₁.

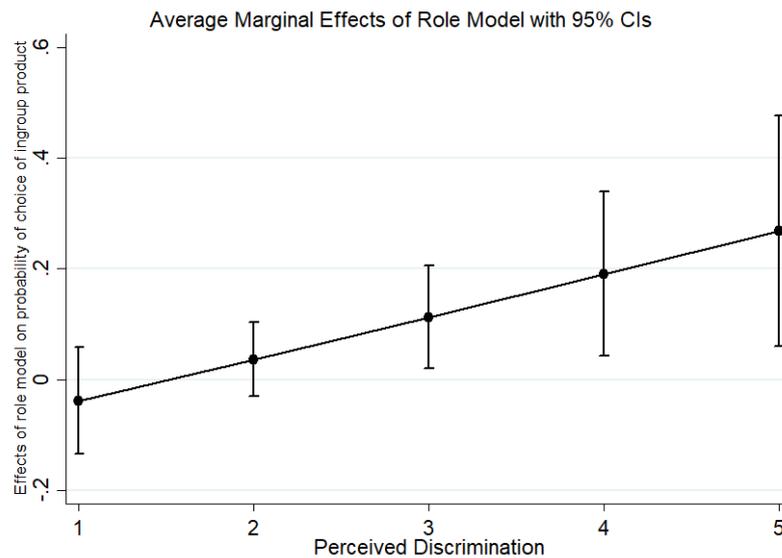
Table 4: Logistic regression models

VARIABLES	Hair product set			
	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
Role Model	0.333* (0.168)	0.258 (0.204)	0.325 (0.169)	0.261 (0.205)
Perceived Discrimination	0.237** (0.0835)	0.210* (0.103)	0.0410 (0.117)	0.00377 (0.139)
Role Model x Perceived Discrimination			0.409* (0.171)	0.455* (0.208)
<i>Controls</i>				
Age		0.006 (0.010)		0.007 (0.010)
School level		0.384* (0.151)		0.414** (0.152)
Marital status		-0.213 (0.215)		-0.218 (0.215)
Income		0.0158 (0.137)		0.00165 (0.138)
Hair straightening		-2.530*** (0.208)		-2.532*** (0.209)
Threat condition		0.00726 (0.206)		-0.0144 (0.207)
N of obs.	594	594	594	594

Note: Standard errors between parentheses. *** $p < 0.1\%$, ** $p < 1\%$, * $p < 5\%$

More importantly, the interaction between perceived discrimination and role model was positive and significant (Model 7: $\beta = 0.41$, $p = .02$) and this result was robust to the inclusion of covariates (Model 8: $\beta = 0.46$, $p = .03$). As interactions in logistic regression models are not as straightforward to evaluate as in linear regression models (Berry, DeMeritt & Esarrey, 2010), we depict in Figure 1 the marginal effects of role model on the probability of choosing an ingroup product, rather than the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable at different levels of the moderator, as usual in consumer behavior studies using linear models. Thus, a value of zero in the vertical axis means the absence of an effect of the role model on the choice of the ingroup product.

Figure 1: Probability of choosing a curly or kinky hair product set



The graph indicates that, while the role model has no effect for low levels of perceived prejudice it reaches a positive and significant effect on the probability of choice of the ingroup product for higher levels of perceived discrimination, which supports H₂.

General Discussion

Body image is not only connected to what we think about ourselves, but also about what other thinks of us. Role models can be a powerful tool to make people from minority groups to see themselves represented in positions customarily occupied by the dominant social groups. In this study, we focused on the effect of a role model on the adoption of ingroup standards in the form of identity-congruent consumption by black women. Further, we analyzed the moderating effect of stereotype threats on such choice. Precisely, we expected that role models would be particularly important when individuals experience threats towards their social identity.

In an online experiment, we documented a significant interaction between role model and perceived hair discrimination on likelihood to adopt an ingroup (vs. outgroup) beauty standard. More to the point, results showed that the effect of threat on the likelihood to choose a curly and kinky hair product set (vs. a straight and chemically treated product set) was exacerbated when participants showed higher levels of perceived discrimination.

Overall, this study provided indications towards the relevance of role models on the life of African American women and possibly other groups suffering from social identity threats with a highly consequential and socially significant consumption variable: a hair product set.

Implications and Limitations

This study builds to the social identity threat literature, showing the power it bears to vulnerable individuals. Nonetheless, this research also brings further confirmation of the relevance of ingroup individuals in positions of power for the lives of minorities, including for their body image and consumer behavior. Although we focused on beauty

standards, this effect can be possibly replicable to other important areas of life, such as career choices.

From a consumer behavior standpoint, this can be particularly useful to the beauty industry, which can capitalize on how to market their products. The relevance of role models shows the power of representativeness on body image and identity of black women. Campaigns aiming to bring awareness to the matter or advertisements using role models as spokesperson might have a big potential for companies in this field and/or that focuses on this public as target.

However, when considering our manipulations, we could not observe any significant direct or interaction effects. This suggests that our experiment may have had limitations regarding our treatments. One possible explanation is that the threat manipulation was on the same domain of the dependent variable, both being related to beauty standards. It would be interesting to try other approaches on this condition, such as using other domains of threat to women of color. Also, the effect of the role model faded when including controls, and this was mainly due to the unbalance across treatment conditions on the covariate hair straightening on our sample. Both limitations can and should be addressed by future studies.

Conclusion

Black women are constantly under prejudice and threatening events towards their identities. This article intended to show how role models help black women to cope with the negative image of their group, particularly when threats to their social identity are made salient. We showed that role models prompt black women to adopt identify-congruent beauty standards, and this effect gains importance as the prejudices encountered by them grows in salience. Future research should address the limitations of this study and focus on the boundary condition in which the stereotype threat can be leading to avoidance or to proximity to the ingroup standards and consumption.

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