

Put the Scissors and Straighteners Away: Males Prefer Long, Curly Hair

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INTRODUCTION

Length of a woman's hair conveys information regarding her health and vitality from an evolutionary perspective (Hinsz et al., 2001). What we are unaware of is how males rate women's attractiveness regarding curly or straight hairstyle. There is evolutionary support that hairstyles have advantages for survival according to regional differences like temperature and sunlight availability (Iyengar, 1998); however, due to technology, these differences may not be as important for reproductive fitness. Without this advantage, we pose that media may have the greatest influence on how women choose to wear their hair as well as how men perceive their attractiveness. Due to the mere-exposure effect alone, a prevalence of a certain style could breed familiarity and therefore preference to it (Bornstein, 1989; Zajonc, 1968).

The purpose of this study was to determine whether men are more attracted to women with long curly hair, long straight hair, short curly hair, or short straight hair. From an evolutionary perspective, males should prefer women with long hair over short hair, regardless of style. From a social perspective, males should prefer women with hairstyles that are more prevalent in the media.

EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN

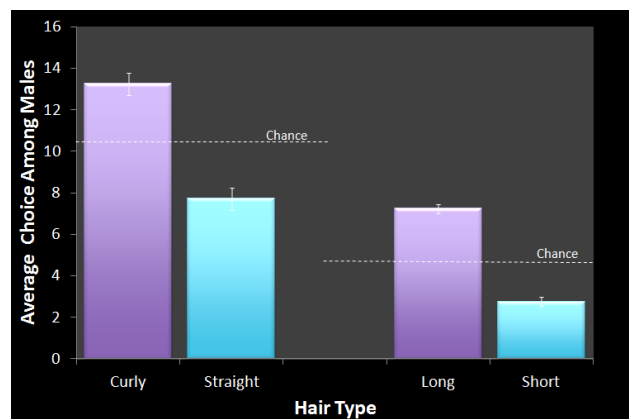
Sixty-five heterosexual males (18-22 years) from Austin College were recruited through the psychology participant pool, given extra credit for their participation in the study, and treated in accordance with the Austin College IRB.

Participants chose between pairs of digitally altered headshots (long/short or straight/curly) and rated headshots for attractiveness on a scale of 1-10.

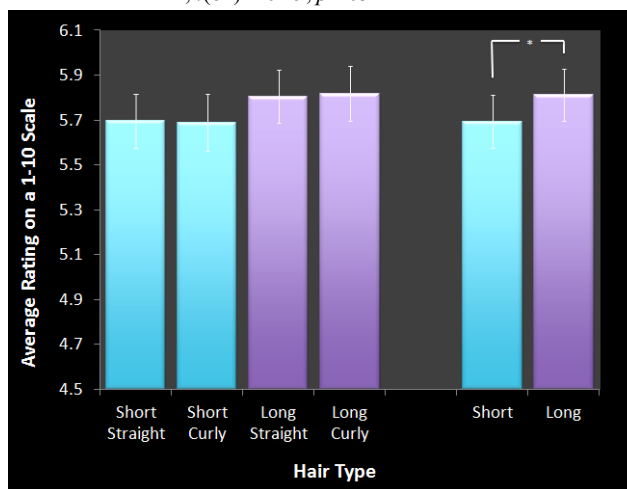
Afterwards, participants indicated their conscious preference for women's hair length and style and specified whether or not media influenced their opinions. *People* magazines from 2007 to 2012 were utilized as archival research.



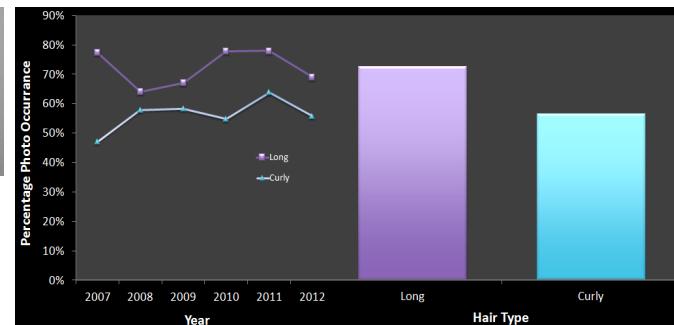
Example of hair manipulation



Men had a greater than chance level preference for curly hair, $t(64)=5.19, p<.05$. Males also preferred long hair significantly more than chance, $t(64)=10.19, p<.05$.



There was no significant difference in how males rated the four hair styles, $F(3,186)=2.03, p=.11$; however, men rated long hair as significantly more attractive than short hair, $F(1,62)=4.72, p<.05$.



When examining *People* magazine from 2007 to 2012, long hair occurred in 72.2% of the full page model ads, and curly hair occurred in 56.2% of the full page model ads.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

- Results showed that when males were forced to choose between short and long hair or straight and curly hair, they preferred long and curly hair significantly more than chance. In addition, males rated long hair as significantly more attractive than short hair, regardless of style. Furthermore, males consciously indicated a preference for long hair in 92.2% of the surveys and curly hair in 57.8% of the surveys.
- Magazines currently publish more photos of women with long hair, as opposed to short hair, regardless of hairstyle; though, results did not support any significant trend of shift in hairstyles from straight to curly between 2007-2012. When asked, 57.8% of male participants said they were consciously aware that media played a role in their hairstyle preferences.
- These preferences support the evolutionary hypothesis for long hair being selected for since it indicates good health, youth, and reproductive potential. The mere exposure effect of prevalence for long and curly hair may be associated as well.
- To further this research, it would be necessary to analyze archival research beyond the year 2007. Additionally, a more ethnically diverse group of males and females should be included to test the preferences for hair lengths and styles cross-culturally.