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The Specter of Excess

Race, Class, and Gender in Women's Body Hair Narratives

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Hairy.
Manly.
Dirty.
Animal-like.

Women face these accusations when they choose not to shave, because traditional gender roles have made the body a source of political contention. One recent study states, "Far from being the inevitable outcome of a biological imperative, femininity is produced through a range of practices, including normative body-altering work such as routine hair removal. The very normativity of such practices obscures their constructive role" (Toerien and Wilkinson 2003, 334). Thus, body hair removal is one way women obey social norms dictated by patriarchal expectations. Though over 99 percent of women in the United States reported removing body hair at some point in their lives, few studies have addressed this phenomenon in detail, particularly in light of social identity categories such as race, class, and gender. The few studies conducted on body hair have found that women overwhelmingly construct body hair removal as a normative and taken-for-granted practice that produces an "acceptable" femininity (Toerien, Wilkinson, and Choi 2005). Shaving and plucking—labor women invest in their bodies—constitute practices adopted by most women in the United States, with women typically removing hair from underarms, legs, pubic area, eyebrows, and face. Departure from these norms often elicits negative affect and appraisal for those who rebel; women who do not shave or remove hair report feeling judged and negatively evaluated as "dirty," "gross," and "repulsive" (Toerien and Wilkinson 2004). Further, women rate other women who do not shave as less attractive, intelligent, sociable, happy, and positive compared with hairless women (Basow and Braman 1998).

Research on Body Hair Norms

Historically men's hair has been linked to virility and power, while women's body hair has been associated with "female wantonness" and the denial of women's sexuality (Toerien and Wilkinson 2003). Some accounts, however, eroticize hairy women

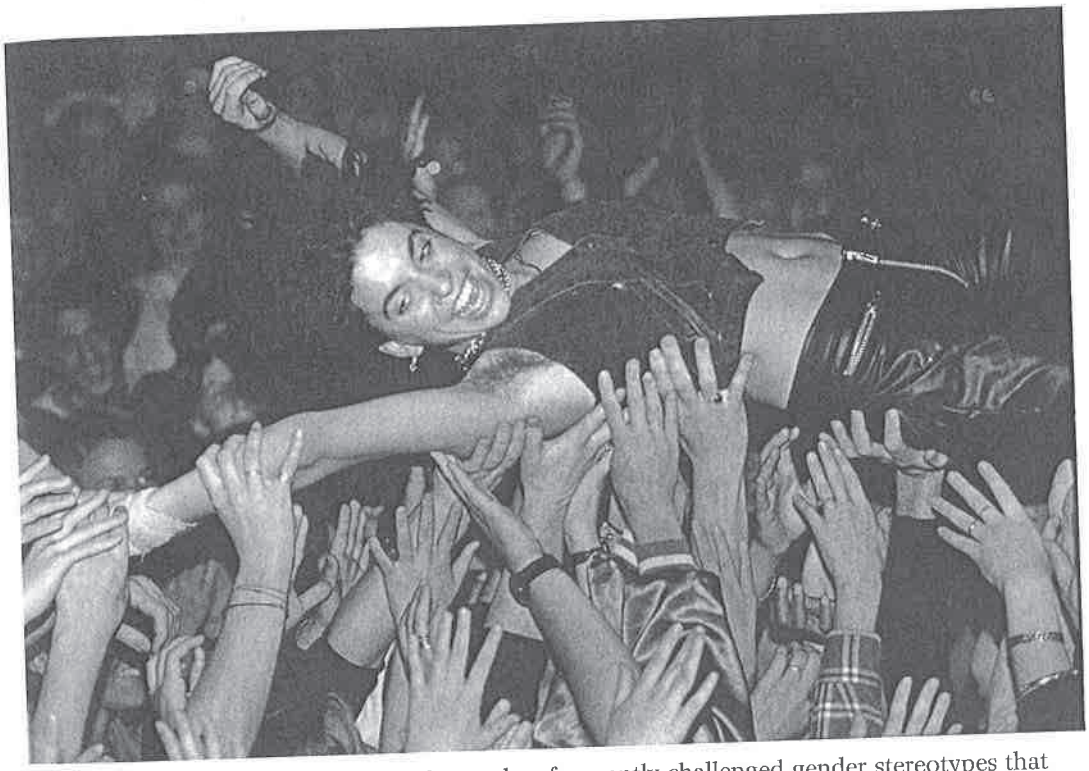
as desirable, powerful, and highly sexed; for example, some tribal cultures in central Africa embrace women's body hair as a source of power. Typically, female body hair has been linked to insanity, witchcraft, and the devil, while male body hair (particularly facial hair) has been linked to power, strength, fertility, leadership, lustfulness, and masculinity. Feminist scholars have noted that women pluck and shave in order to appear more sexless and infantile and that, in cultures that feel threatened by female power, hairlessness norms have become more pervasive. Lack of pubic hair, for example, may represent the eroticization of girlhood rather than womanhood, a fact that concerns those interested in full gender equality (Toerien and Wilkinson 2003). Some prominent feminists, such as the folk singer Ani DiFranco, have resisted shaving norms publicly and defiantly.

Body hair removal is normative in a variety of cultures, including England, Australia, Egypt, Greece, Italy, Uganda, and Turkey (Cooper 1971; Tiggemann and Kenyon 1998). Within these cultures, over 80 percent of women consistently comply with hair removal, typically beginning at puberty. Before the 1920s, however, few Western women ever removed body hair. Historians suggest that U.S. advertising campaigns in the 1930s ushered in body hair removal, with advice by "beauty experts" and changes in typical fashion (e.g., outfits revealing more skin, celebration of prepubescent female bodies), helping to establish hair removal as a new social convention (Hope 1982). Body hair removal, though relatively recent as a historical development, has spanned the globe: recent studies of Australian women found that nearly 97 percent of women shave their underarms and legs (Tiggemann and Lewis 2004). Research on American women has shown that 92 percent removed their leg hair and 93 percent removed underarm hair, indicating that women comply with body hair norms at rates much higher than those for other dominant body practices (e.g., thinness, long hair, makeup, manicured nails) (Tiggemann and Kenyon 1998).

Not all women are equally eager to remove body hair. For many decades, women in Europe shaved less often than U.S. women, yet this divide is narrowing. There is some evidence that feminist identity, lesbian identity, and older age may predict decreased likelihood of hair removal (Basow 1991; Toerien, Wilkinson, and Choi 2005). The 1960s and 1970s saw women growing underarm hair as a political statement attached to bohemian identity and leftist politics, suggesting that hair may also signify political, regional, and national attachment.

Still, researchers have found "strong evidence of a widespread symbolic association between body hair—or its absence—and ideal gender: to have a hairy body is a sign of masculinity, to have a hairless one a sign of femininity" (Basow 1991, 84). Emphasis on women's hairlessness emphasizes women's differentness from men and highlights that, unlike men's bodies, women's bodies are unacceptable in their natural state (Basow 1991). Women learn to associate their hairlessness with ideal femininity, in part because of mass media and marketing campaigns (Whelehan 2000). In particular, women shave their legs and underarms to achieve femininity and overall attractiveness, and they shave pubic hair to achieve sexual attractiveness and self-enhancement. In addition, women with partners—male or female—reported more frequent pubic hair removal (Tiggemann and Hodgson 2008).

Hair removal practices also correlate with other body modification practices; women who shave more often report unhealthy dieting, cosmetic surgeries, and general body dissatisfaction (Tiggemann and Hodgson 2008). That hair removal seems



The folk singer and feminist Ani DiFranco has frequently challenged gender stereotypes that women should be hairless, polite, and reverent to a music industry controlled by men. She runs her own music label, rebels against body norms, and is shown here with fully grown underarm hair at one of her shows. (Reproduced by permission from Matt Hagen.)

trivial and relatively unnoticed makes it all the more potent as a means of social control, because women adopt ideas about idealized femininity without considering the ramifications of those ideologies and accompanying practices. Hairlessness norms mark femininity as clearly different from masculinity; femininity becomes associated with "tameness," docility, and immaturity, while masculinity is associated with power and dominance (Toerien and Wilkinson 2003). Women with negative attitudes toward body hair more often felt disgusted with their bodies in general (Toerien and Wilkinson 2004). Also, women who shaved described feeling that their bodies were unacceptable and unattractive in their natural state (Chapkis 1986). Paradoxically, women recognize the normative pressures placed on them to shave but generally cannot accept these as a rationale for changing their specific behaviors around shaving (Tiggemann and Kenyon 1998). Though few studies have asked women why they remove body hair, some studies have indirectly and unsystematically included women's rationale for hair removal. Women said they removed body hair to feel cleaner, more feminine, more confident about themselves, and more attractive. Some women liked the "soft, silky feeling" of shaved legs, while others enjoyed feeling sexually attractive to men (Tiggemann and Hodgson 2008).

To date, no studies have directly and systematically addressed the race, class, and sexual identity implications of body hair practices, even though some research has

identified female subjects by these categories (Tiggemann and Hodgson 2008; Weitz 2004). Feminist scholars have argued that femininity is a white, middle-classed signifier against which women of color and working-class women have been defined as deviant, thus requiring that they meet the standards of white, middle-class femininity "to avoid being positioned as vulgar, pathological, tasteless, and sexual" (Skeggs 1997, 100). Nonetheless, most body hair studies ignore race and class. One study found that whites, on average, have more body hair than most other "races" (Cooper 1971). Though no systematic studies exist about body hair and social class, some researchers have offered compelling theoretical links between these factors: "Given that the presence of hair on a woman's body may be taken to represent dirtiness, poor grooming, and laziness, by retaining her body hair, a woman may risk being negatively positioned by representations of the 'unruly,' 'out of control,' 'vulgar' working-class woman" (Toerien and Wilkinson 2003, 342). Still, direct analysis of how conformity to, or violation of, hair removal practices relate to social identities of race, class, and sexual identity remain relatively absent from the current literature.

Methods

The central research question of this chapter asks, How do women from different identity categories react when temporarily rejecting the social norm of shaving? In response, this chapter analyzes the role of body hair in the construction of women's raced, classed, and gendered identities. Our findings emerge from a content analysis of a class assignment undertaken by women enrolled in a course on women and health at a large southwestern university.

During a recent semester of Fahs's Women and Health course, students were invited to participate in an extra-credit assignment that asked them to grow out their body hair (underarm, leg, and pubic) for twelve weeks. Students kept weekly logs of their personal reactions to their body hair, others' reactions to it, any changes in behavior noted, and thoughts about how changes in body hair affected their health and sexuality. The twenty enrolled students included nineteen women and one man; as such, the man performed the opposite social norm by shaving for twelve weeks, though he did not turn in a paper and is excluded from this analysis because of the difficulty of generalizing from one person's experience.[1] The sample for this study included nineteen women (35 percent women of color, primarily Latina; 65 percent white women), nearly all of whom were under age thirty (only two students were over age thirty). Students turned in their weekly logs and a reflection paper based on the body hair experiment.

This chapter draws from those narratives to illustrate the compulsory qualities of body-hair-norm adherence and to illuminate the more specific elements of race, class, and gender norming related to depilation. The narratives discuss the following issues:

1. Misinformation that arises when women violate social norms (e.g., belief that hair is dirty, abnormal, and bacteria-laden)
2. The race, class, and gender implications of growing body hair (e.g., violation of raced and classed norms with their Latino/Latina family)

3. Confrontation of social responses to growing body hair (e.g., partner refusing sex; friends' teasing)
4. The relationship between social norms and social policing, particularly as it relates to postexperimental reflections (e.g., the difficulty of purposefully constructing one's body outside of "normal" body standards)

This chapter considers the perceived positive and negative outcomes of challenging body hair norms for these students, including the gendered, raced, and classed impact of social rejection as it affects different women. Additionally, the social psychological dynamics of reproducing social conformity and obedience to authority in the classroom is a secondary subject of inquiry. Despite the assignment's being extra credit and worth a mere two points, women who initially resisted participating eventually gave in to social pressures to grow their body hair as a way to join group dynamics. Finally, we consider two abstract themes: how challenging body hair norms forges new communities at the margins of pervasive social norms, and how women use their bodies as mechanisms for resistance and rebellion.

"Hiding in the House": Mythologies and Disgust about Body Hair

As expected because of the literatures on body hair removal for women, many women described strongly negative feelings about the process of growing out their body hair, noting, most prominently, several "facts" that indicated widespread misinformation and distortion about body hair. Women reported initial feelings—internally driven and communicated by friends and family—that not shaving would lead to razor rash, extreme bacterial growth, and excessive amounts of sweating, and that body hair was fundamentally unsanitary. Repeated discussions of cleanliness and hair as "dirty and gross" appeared in women's narratives of their body hair.

Also permeating women's narratives were internalized beliefs about hair as disgusting and inherently unhealthy. Participants claimed that body hair caused germs to multiply on their bodies, and that it posed a serious health risk. Esperanza, a woman of color, wrote, "My sister said it was absolutely gross and out of this world. My biggest problem I had was not shaving my pubic hair. I hated my body during my period. Hygiene wise, it was the worst experience I ever had. I would not stop shaving my pubic hair unless I had a medical impediment that forced me to do it."[2]

Often women described others as reacting in a negative or even overtly hostile manner, such as Latina-identified Ana: "My mom said it was unsanitary and disgusting and that I needed to stay away from her because the look of it grossed her out, and if my leg or underarm hair touched her, she'd have to take a shower."

Consequently, women altered their behaviors to avoid negative social penalties. The substantial list of behavior changes women made included refusing to wear certain kinds of clothes (e.g., dresses, shorts, Capri pants, tank tops, and bathing suits), hiding in their houses rather than going out with friends, avoiding exercise or the gym, having sex with their partners less often or not at all, not going on job interviews, taking more showers, putting on more lotion, wearing excessive amounts of deodorant, and avoiding the sensation of the "wind blowing through the hair." Women also reported emotional reactions to the exercise: developing fear that strangers (e.g.,

mailmen, servers, gynecologists) would ridicule them, having nervous reactions when visiting family members, and feeling general unease.

In addition to these behavioral changes, women reported that others accused them of not being womanly enough or of conforming to stereotypes of women's studies students as hairy and manly. Cecilia, a woman of color, described this heteronormative patrolling:

> My sister called me a women's studies lesbian and said I needed to change my major because it was messing with my mind and turning me into a man. My male relatives were name-calling me lesbian, he-she, ape, mud flaps, and they were laughing. My partner explained that I had been doing it for a school experiment. They could not understand why I would even do something like this for school or why my partner would allow it.

Mariah, a white woman, said, "My family and my mom said I looked like a feminist dyke and I looked disgusting," and Samantha, a white woman, said, "My boyfriend made a joke about how I might as well go as a werewolf for Halloween because I already have a costume. I feel like a man."

Dreaded Otherness: Race, Class, and Gender Narratives about Body Hair

Many reactions to women's body hair carried raced and classed dimensions. Women of color and working-class women reported more familial regulation about body hair and far more social penalties for growing out their hair than did the white middle- or upper-class women. Women of color and working-class women, particularly working-class women of color, struggled with body hair because it exacerbated their sense of "differentness" from the white middle- or upper-class women in class. While the assignment was a useful tool for self-analysis, it also, unexpectedly, encouraged students to reflect about otherness. For example, Ana said,

> When I compared my hair to the hair of the other girls in class, there was an obvious difference. My hair grew in thick and coarse. The other Latina women in the class understood that the white girls had it easier because their hair was thinner. I felt like people would think I was a "dirty Mexican" because of the hair, that I was doing something nasty, and people would connect my body hair to my being lesbian or Mexican.

The patrolling of gender norms also appeared more strongly for women of color, among whom being a "good woman" appeared frequently in their discussions of family reactions. Ana wrote about her family reactions, "My mom told my uncles and grandparents so next time I went over to have dinner with the family, there was a lot of talking about my body hair and everyone wanted to see. My grandpa said, '*Mija*, no one wants a girl that doesn't shave and looks like a man.'"

Several other Latina women described their parents as engaging in similar heteronormative patrolling of their bodies. This behavior could reveal their preoccupation with not adding further stigma to already stigmatized bodies, as Patricia Hill Collins

(2006) discussed in her work about stigmatized black identities. For example, Cecilia said, "My mother was so upset that she scolded me and asked if I needed money to purchase razors or if something was wrong. She thought she did not teach me the proper way to clean myself. My mom could not look at me and asked that I cover up. She called me a lesbian and wanted me to stop my women's studies classes because they were corrupting my mind, my beliefs, and my identity." Lupe, a woman of color, admitted that race and class affected her reactions to body hair; she discussed the fear of dreaded Otherness, that is, not wanting to confirm stereotypes of women of color or poor women as unkempt or dirty. She said, "I come from a family that didn't have much money, and to let yourself go is going against everything I have been taught. I'm always careful about coming across as respectable and clean, just so I don't confirm all of those stereotypes people have of me as dirty and low class."

Many women of color noticed that their hair grew in thicker and darker than white women's hair. This theme emerged directly and indirectly in their reflection papers, and it also appeared, combined with fear of further stigma, in their narratives. Esperanza wrote, "Just looking at my armpits in the mirror doesn't scare me, but knowing that somebody else might see them and look at me like a dirty and unhygienic person can be disturbing." Sharon, who could not finish the assignment because she found it intolerable for her self-image, also wrote about her fear of being perceived as dirty, saying, "As a black woman, I know what it's like to be looked down upon by white people. I don't need to be made aware of that any more than I already am."

Some students of color felt a need to enhance their outward appearance of femininity to compensate for their hairiness (though this need also occurred, to a lesser degree, for white women). A few students of color dressed in more typically "feminine" dress. Ana wrote:

> I found myself wearing makeup more often, at first unconsciously. Before I'd stopped shaving, I hardly ever wore makeup. I started because I didn't want anyone to think that I didn't "take care of myself" and I'm always aware of the fact that as a Mexican, I have to go that extra mile. I'm not a college professor and I don't live and work with other feminists like some of my girlfriends do. I'm a waitress, and my coworkers would think I was a freak.

Again, this example reveals the way that violating one social norm may enforce other social norms more intensely, such that women of color and working-class women may adopt more traditional norms of femininity even as they violate norms of hairlessness.

Discourses of race and class also appeared in the white women's narratives about their body hair, as white women expressed awareness of their difference from women of color in class. Lauren, a white woman, wrote: "It has become not a big deal to me, but still a shock to my friends and family. Most say I could quit and no one would know. I replied, 'I like to show and tell in class.' It is fun for me because I have much less hair compared to the girls in the class of Mexican descent." Lana, another white student, noted: "There's such a clear difference between the light-skinned women and the women of color. I notice that I'm totally privileged in that no one really even notices if I grow my leg hair out, whereas for them, it's dark and noticeable right away."

Thus, race and class narratives appeared specifically when women described their fear of others' reactions, particularly within the family. This observation aligns with Beverly Skeggs's (1997) claim that women of color and working-class women face comparisons with "idealized femininity" represented by white, middle-class women. Women of color battle not only against patriarchal standards but also against white middle-class femininity as "superior" (Collins 2006; Lovejoy 2001). The additional stigma of body hair for women of color and working-class women may feel intolerable because of the bodily, social, and psychological stigma they already regularly encounter in their lives.

"Looking Like a Bear": Confronting Social Responses to Body Hair

Some of the most interesting findings from this experiment included women's confrontations of others' responses to their growing body hair. While women described concerns about going on job interviews and confronting their parents' disapproval or worrying about siblings' reactions, women's feelings about the reactions of their romantic partners and friends were particularly intense. Specifically, women reported heightened awareness of seeking approval from their partners, particularly their boyfriends, as they overrelied on male approval when assessing their self-worth and personal identity (notably, women who had female partners expressed fewer such concerns). Eva, a woman of color, wrote: "My boyfriend's opinion is the person whose opinion I tend to value the most. He never said anything hurtful. He did, however, dismiss it as another one of my crazy feminist approaches to dealing with the world. Ouch. Being called crazy is perhaps more painful than being laughed at or called gross."

Several women said their male partners initially offered support but then changed their minds and felt threatened later on during the semester. Nadia, a white woman, wrote:

> On our way to bed he said, "I love you but I have something to say to you. Your leg hair is poking me." I was like, "Do you want me to shave it off?" and he was quiet and said no. Later, he said, "I didn't want to tell you but your hair is as long as mine and I really didn't think it would grow that long in such a short amount of time. I miss the smoothness of your skin." Then later, my boyfriend called to make sure that I didn't start *liking* that manly hair and that I didn't continue with the experiment.

This reaction may represent common homophobic reactions, because other women reported that their boyfriends feared, at least implicitly, that they would turn into lesbians. Samantha reported:

> I was fine with the whole idea of not shaving until my partner started making comments. He was very supportive at first but he had a hard time with it later. He joked a lot about it being gross. I felt gross during sex. I would get distracted and I could not reach orgasm. My boyfriend would ask me every day to shave my pubic hair and say that the teacher would never know anyways. I think it might be because he thinks he has some control over my sex organs.

That some women's boyfriends who worried about women turning into lesbians also sensed a loss of control over their girlfriends sheds light on some dangerous implications for heterosexual relationships.

Some women described intense hostility from their male partners. Kim, a white student, said, "My partner said, 'I'm not going to wipe my ass until you shave,' as if that was the same thing!" Cecilia wrote:

> My partner noticed for the first time and was appalled by the sight of my pit hair being so long. He requested that I shave and would laugh at me. He boycotted sex with me, saying it was too hairy or a jungle down there. He asked that I not put my arms up while sleeping because it troubled him just the sight of it. He stopped rubbing my legs or showing me any affection. He made a decision not to be in the same room while I changed clothes or when I got out of the shower. He would compare me to an ape or a man.

She later reflected that his resistance to her body hair made her question her relationship with him.

Women also confronted social regulation through their friends, who were often hostile, disapproving, and disgusted by their hair. At the same time, other women had friends who happily joined them in not shaving just to see what it felt like. Perhaps not shaving had some degree of "hipness," particularly if women had a formal excuse to do so (e.g., "It's for a class assignment!"). Ana wrote, "A friend at work stopped shaving with me after she heard, as did another friend of mine. Most of my friends were very supportive and weren't nasty about it—a much better reaction than my family. . . . I liked comparing hair length and thickness with the other women in the class each day." Negative reactions, however, dominated women's response papers. Lauren wrote, "My friend took one look at my hair and said he would kick his wife out of bed if she decided to stop shaving. He said it was disgusting and unattractive." Mariah said, "My friend freaked out and said, 'Daaaang.' People just don't seem to understand the reasoning for it even if I explain that I'm going against a social norm to see how people react." Eva also experienced negative reactions from her friends: "My best friend said I looked like a bear. She said I was lucky I had a boyfriend and wasn't in the 'singles scene.' She said I better shave for her party next weekend or wear something to cover it up because she didn't want me to scare guests."

"Painful and Freeing": Postexperimental Reflections

Women's postexperiment reflections provided textured and relevant comments about body hair norms and their experiences resisting them. Their responses indicate that even temporary and purposeful breaks from social norms can powerfully socialize women into an altered understanding of how much they "choose" to do things such as shave, wear makeup, or conform to standard presentations of femininity. Even the few women who felt lukewarm about the assignment described more awareness of how their bodies circulated in public space.

Some women described genuinely positive reactions to not shaving for a set period. Zoe, a white student, wrote:

> I have noticed I have become more comfortable in my own body. My hair isn't some foreign object that routinely must be removed for fear of not being feminine enough. I have come to realize that shaving as a whole is a patriarchal, consumerist-driven chore that society has required and frequently reprimanded women for if they don't do it enough. I'm sick of being criticized for my natural bodily hair. This is my body. . . . This assignment has helped me to feel more confident and more comfortable about who I am as a person. I won't be pushed around or bullied into what others feel is right, clean, or sanitary.

Stories of personal empowerment appeared regularly in women's reactions to this experiment.

Women also expressed a heightened awareness of gender norms and expectations in general. Lauren, for example, wrote:

> This makes me think, when will it end? Are women worse off or better off now? We don't have to stay at home and wear pearls while vacuuming and cooking all day for our husbands. We have more rights and choices, but in a way we have only added to the expectations of women rather than fully changed them. Now we wear pearls, heels, shave, wear makeup, have styled hair, are thin—the look of today's most desired women. Combined with this, we're supposed to have an education, a successful career, a social life, and a happy (traditional) family life. I feel like now that I know these things I have a responsibility to myself as well as others. I am not at all a radical, not the kind of person to speak or act out, but I can keep myself informed, think more critically, and change my actions if need be.

Similarly, Mariah expressed outrage about gender norms, noting that this assignment flagged many gendered behaviors she had not previously acknowledged: "I thought it was interesting and fun because we were being unique and not conforming to the rest of society. I'm upset with how we instill in women to look a certain way to be accepted. There's not only one way to look. I wish that society could change their view of women's bodies so it's more healthy."

Some women were acutely aware of the limitations of their feminist politics after participating in this exercise. For example, Parker, a white student, wrote: "It was a hard experiment for me because I can honestly say that I conform to what society expects of me as a female—high heels, Victoria's Secret, looking good in public, makeup. I have been happy but I do see that I need to sometimes take a step back and look at the reasons I do things." Eva indicated even more ambivalence, wondering whether her feminist politics had advanced enough to support such an assignment. She wrote:

> This experience was more painful than freeing because it made me realize that I have a lot of soul searching to do. Although I am always the first to reject many of our society's norms, they never quite affect me as directly as this assignment did. I can't yet deal with the backlash of others when resisting social norms about looking good. This assignment did help me to get one step closer to who I aspire to be. I want to accept myself.

Still, women described consciousness-raising around gender as a result of the body hair experiment, particularly when considering implicit societal norms and the value women receive from "feminine" bodies. Cecilia wrote:

> Going through this opened up a new world for me. When other women would make fun of me or call me names, it made me realize that they were very ignorant to the social construction of body norms. It upset me that we're in the twenty-first century and women still don't get it. My partner's rejection was the most painful, and it made it apparent to me that it's not what's inside of me that matters, but rather, the outside of me. I have learned that hair is powerful.

Several women from that semester contacted us many months later to report some of the long-term changes they had made. Most said that they shave less often now, though a few said that after feeling deprived of shaving for several months, they started shaving more often. Cecilia reported that she broke up with her partner. Ana wrote, "Whether I want to give up shaving altogether is something I don't know, but I know it made me more accepting of body hair in general." Mariah said, "I'm not as self-conscious about it and I don't shave everyday anymore. I think this task is interesting and life altering. It may not change my life completely but it did make me think about social constructions long after the class ended." Some women continued not shaving. Cecilia, for example, said, "I enjoyed letting my body hair grow free and not have a care in the world about what others think. I have learned to respect and appreciate my body since this experience. I'm still a real woman with hairy pits, hairy legs, and an overgrown female bush." Generally, the experiment proved to have significance in their lives well after that semester and into the following year. The social justice implications for the experiment, however, had limitations.

Classroom Social Psychology of Body Hair Norms

Although the original intent of the experiment was to challenge social norms and subvert compulsory shaving demands, the assignment ultimately created a new social norm within the classroom—a point we think is worthy of further consideration for future semesters and, more generally, in pedagogical experiments of this sort. Originally, five women in the class decided not to participate in the assignment but eventually gave in and participated because they felt left out of the social conversations that occurred informally between students at the start of class. Creating a new social norm that demanded that women not shave in some ways defeated or at least minimized the original purpose of the assignment. This outcome again shows the fluidity of what constitutes a norm in any particular context and the powerful pressures women face when conforming to social norms about their bodies, whatever they may be in any given circumstance. Throughout the semester, the context of norm transgression itself became normative.

For Fahs, as instructor, it was puzzling to witness how the students relied on "authority" to resist shaving norms. Indeed, the optional assignment earned them a mere two points, yet students (and sometimes students' friends) seemed to enjoy having an

excuse not to shave that was based on someone else's "telling them" not to. Interestingly, the following semester, students in Fahs's courses asked whether they, too, could participate in the body hair experiment, indicating that they wanted to try not shaving but apparently did not feel entitled to resist shaving without an authority figure demanding or endorsing it.[3] Seemingly, individuals perceived the subversion of social norms as a smaller offense if done for a reason other than subversion itself, particularly if it involved an authority figure. These dynamics point to the complexities of challenging social norms while simultaneously recreating those same norms, a problem that speaks to the fascinating and unsettling qualities of groupthink within resistance communities.

Conclusion

Women formed a community of resistance around rebelling against shaving norms, even while that community imposed its own set of norms on the straggling students who wanted to continue shaving. While the specter of excess—that persistent norm communicated to women that they must conform to hairless femininity and not be "too much" through the disciplining of their bodies—made itself apparent in their lives, their lack of shaving was a key form of embodied resistance. Notably, our sample included young undergraduate women, so we cannot in any way account for generational differences, gender differences, geographic (and weather) differences, or educational differences, nor can we broaden our findings to larger populations. We also remain uncertain about whether this pedagogical experiment would translate in other contexts or universities, though Fahs has found similar, yet more gender-specific, results after successfully completing the experiment in a larger class of sixty-five students.

Collectively, these results suggest that women of color and working-class women were most negatively affected by the process of not shaving, because not shaving added a layer of bodily oppression to the stigma they already experienced as lower-status women and because, for women of color, their hair was darker, coarser, and more pronounced than white women's hair. Further, women of color encountered more negative reactions from family members, indicating that the regulation of body norms within family environments may be more salient for women of color than for white women.

Still, all women encountered at least some negative reactions from others, friends or partners and even strangers. Feelings of disgust, self-loathing, lack of cleanliness, and lack of sexual desirability permeated women's narratives, indicating that shaving-engendered social penalties resulted for those who refused to comply with mandated female hairlessness. Yet, in resisting these body norms even temporarily, women made visible the processes by which they conformed while also challenging and resisting power imbalances between men and women, particularly the assumption that women are unattractive in their natural state. Their makeshift community around challenging body hair norms bolstered their courage, fostered communication, and opened dialogue around the junctures between feminist politics, race, class, and the subversion of body norms even as it generated a new, though temporary social norm in the classroom.

NOTES

1. The male student expressed surprise about the time and effort shaving took. Though he experienced less social penalty than female students, he felt physically uncomfortable and "itchy" throughout the experiment.
2. All participants were assigned pseudonyms to ensure anonymity.
3. Fahs recently conducted the experiment again in a larger class of sixty-five students. In the first week of the experiment, a group of men banded together to blog about their experiences, complaining online that shaving required effort, time, and carefulness and that they experienced homophobic reactions from other men when they shaved their bodies. These experiences are documented in forthcoming articles in *Feminism and Psychology* and *Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal.*

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