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### Cultural Technology Paper: Hair

Almost anything anyone does in society is or is related to some type of cultural technology. A cultural technology is any sort of cultural activity where there are social rules, either explicit or more often hidden. Hair is little thought of but it is a very important cultural technology. Hair is a cultural technology because not only is it a way for people to express themselves, but there are hidden rules on how to style hair and there are consequences when people defy the unspoken hair rules.

In the United States, it is traditional for men to cut their hair short, and for women to have their hair styled longer. This has been a thing in Western civilization since at least the age of the Roman empire. However, there are often exceptions to this rule. One of these exceptions is demonstrated in athletes. Often, professional male athletes have longer hair. An outsider may believe that this practice is strange because longer hair is heavier and makes the person overheat more easily. In observing professional and collegiate hockey players and American football players there are quite a few of these players which choose to sport the long hair. Why? One reason could be that it may make the helmets that the players must wear more tolerable; it may provide more padding from an oncoming collision with another player. Another reason may be the culture around the sport itself and the team dynamics. I watched parts of the Minnesota High School State Hockey tournament this weekend, and at the beginning of the games, they introduce the teams by having each player skate up when their name is announced before they put their

helmets on for the game. Almost every single player on each team had longer hair. This seems to be a cultural technology that hockey players have long hair, but the hair is typically very specific. The hair is Football players also are seen sporting longer hair. Typically, this is more designated to certain positions. Wide receivers, some running backs, and many defensive players have this longer hair, yet quarterbacks do not. This could also be more of a cultural thing as well as professionally there is a high percentage of black or African American players who wear their hair in dreads or braids. This may be because they have less time to take care of their hair or go to get it styled due to the time it takes to play a sport professionally. Conversely, it may also be a symbol of status to be able to grow their hair out long. However, professional and collegiate basketball leagues have a high percentage of black or African American players and their hair is typically cut shorter. Therefore, hair length is a cultural technology related to specific sports, not necessarily sports in general. One of the factors that could determine this hair length could be due to the amount of movement in the sport or maybe it is due to the culture around the sport.

In the United States, there are certain rules of hair that must be met in order to avoid social isolation. There are some who defy these standards and are punished by the system for it. Boys with long hair who are not in sports are judged by girls to be messier or seem uncaring in their appearance, especially if they do not know how to take care of said hair style. People with greasy hair was considered careless and dirty; this is a change from other decades like the 1950s where greasy hair was considered desirable. With the expectation that people shower daily (another cultural technology), there is an expectation of hair washing. Those who appear to not have clean hair are punished socially for not following the hidden rules. Especially in middle school and high school, students who are unable to pick up on these cues to wash their hair more are typically ostracized by their peers.

Another one of these unspoken rules in the cultural technology of hair is that a person must not only wash their hair often enough so that there is no visible grease, but that the hair must also be brushed or made to look neat in some capacity. As a young person, I learned this in Elementary school when I went through a stage where I rebelled against my mother wanting to brush my hair. I had very long hair and it was tangled and matted and people either did not talk to me or asked me why my hair looked so messy. From then on, I brushed it until I got tired of brushing it and donated it.

For women in the United States there are more unspoken hair rules because typically women have longer hair and so there are more rules on how to maintain all that hair. One of the rules is in how a woman can style her hair. Little girls can wear their hair in high pigtails, but we would scoff at a woman who walked into a business meeting with the same hairstyle. No one would take her seriously. The same goes for hair accessories. Little girls can wear bows and headbands and clips with fun colors, but professional women do not.

In the United States, as of late there has been a trend for dads to learn how to do their daughters' hair. This is a trend happening primarily in the African American and white communities. Before the hidden rule in the United States was that it was only the mother's responsibility to help their daughters do their hair, not the father's. However with the rise of single and divorced parents in the United States, there has been a push to change this cultural technology to include dads doing their daughter's hair.

Luckily, with the rise of the Millennial and Gen Z generations, there is more of an emphasis or expectation for men to look good and style themselves and not have dirty hair. Typically, male students on the University of Mary campus have short hair and those who aren't

freshmen have a system where they get their hair cut regularly enough so that their hair never gets long or shabby enough that it is noticeable that they are in need of a haircut.

There are even some college campuses where one of the rules of the school is that male students must have shorter hair. According to Monica Yates, Wyoming Catholic College (WYCC) abides by a dress code where male students must have hair shoulder length or shorter and beards that must be trimmed and well-maintained in order to look more professional. She stated in a conversation with me that although this was a rule, there were some male students who got away with breaking this code because of their status on campus. Other male students of lesser status would be threatened with the consequences of breaking the rules.

For female students at the University of Mary, hair length is and can be radically different lengths. Most female student's hair is somewhere around shoulder length and below, usually stopping mid-back, but some girls' have longer hair that goes down towards their lower back length. In most of the United States, females do not typically have hair that reaches their lower backs, but there are more on the University of Mary's campus. One can conclude from observation that this may be because of the number of homeschool girls who have this hair length. Indeed, this could be a cause, but there are also those who were not homeschooled who still have this Rapunzel-esq hair.

One of these unconventional hair styles which has slowly become more normalized is the pixie cut for women. I was not allowed to cut my hair in the popular pixie cut because my mother told me that "no boy wants to date a girl who has short hair, especially hair shorter than theirs" which she was based off of her personal experiences with cutting her hair in the 1990s. I was just very nervous to do anything extreme to my hair and wouldn't have done so anyways, but I always admired those who did because to me it was a sign of rebellion. Also, this is not

true, because people are attracted to confidence, and girls who do cut their hair short typically do have some sort of love interest. However, this hair style is not just for rebels. The hair cut has come to mean confidence and is in a sense a powerful statement. I had cousins on my dad's side where most of the girl cousins my age had their hair cut short. They always seemed very confident and self-sufficient.

Another hair trend which has gained traction mostly with young people is dying hair unnatural colors. Red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple or pink and sometimes all of these at the same time. Even though the University of Mary is fairly conservative in manner, there are still students who dye their hair these vibrant colors. It is partially a rebellion statement, but another part of it comes from the fact that hair is supposed to be a statement or reflection on who they are as a person. It is also just another thing to do, a radical change that one can make so people view them differently. Last year, I was one of these people. I dyed a strand of my hair red with demi-permanent dye. People asked me why I had done it, and I told people that it was because some of my friends who had also dyed their hair with the same red dye had some leftover and I just did it. Looking back, I see that there was more to it than that. I was going through a change in my life, and I wanted something outwardly to reflect this change in my life. I think this is why many people change their hairstyle, to reflect changes in their own lives. This idea of hairstyles reflecting inward changes demonstrates the stereotype that people who go through a breakup get their hair cut. There are two people in the English department I know of in this past year who cut their hair shortly after breaking up with their significant other (though one claimed that it was a "coincidence"). One of my close friends also did this her sophomore year and though she denied that this was the reason at the time, reflecting back upon it she admits that her breakup was the main reason for drastically cutting her hair.

At University of Mary, while some students may defy the social norms, there are fewer professors who defy these norms. Professors want to be taken seriously by their students and their colleagues, and so they abide closer to the traditionally gendered hair styles. It is strange that society has hidden rules that state that there are hair styles which are more professional than others. Hair styles which are perceived as more professional are mostly that they are tidy, neat, and clean. Professors who are women, I have noticed, either pull their hair back or straighten and curl it, and it tends to always look tidy and consistent. There are a few who defy this norm, Dr. Clark of the English department is one. She keeps her hair naturally curly, but she still pulls it back in some manner thus still conforming in some way to the professional norm of having tidy hair. What does this say about our culture? Can professional women never have a bad hair day? Another professor on campus who defies these norms is Dr. Hall. Personally, I have never had Dr. Hall for any classes, and when I saw him my freshmen year, I thought he was the “hippie” teacher (there’s always one). Because the culture has told me that men with long hair are to be perceived as more chill and unconventional, I believed that Dr. Hall’s classes must have been relaxed and low-stress. I found this was not the case, but I judged Dr. Hall’s teaching style based on his hairstyle, and this is why other professors who do not wish to be seen or stereotyped in this way do not have this hair style. Dr. Brumit and Dr. Sportellio’s hair styles remind me of how lost in thought they must be all of the time because their hair is always in a state of disheveledness. How they keep their hair shows how they think (or don’t think) about their appearance.

The same night me and two of my friends dyed our hair red, another one of my friends, Stephanie Hauf, was also present. Even if she had really wanted to participate and dye her hair, she said that she did not think it would be a good idea because she worked at a school in town and did not want to be thought of as unprofessional either by the students or by her lead teacher.

I knew that next year I would be going to one of the schools in town for Practicum, and so I jumped at my last opportunity to do something crazy with my hair and also reflect those inward changes I was going through. This experience and fear of not being taken seriously in the work environment or in the realm of education because of a hair style is real, and it effects how people style their hair. If hair is truly supposed to be an expression, then should professionals not have the option to do what they want with their hair? Obviously, there is a level of freedom, but professors and educators typically do not because of the stigma and because hair is a cultural technology.

A hair trend which has become popularized is No Shave November. It takes more unconventional hair trends and makes them normalized for a whole month. The main one that come to mind when mentioned is males growing out their facial hair for the whole month. Many of the male students who can (or pretend that they can) grow facial hair typically do and it is a sort of bonding thing for them. Most of the time unruly facial hair is frowned upon, but for this month it is considered a cultural norm. According to the No-Shave November website, the goal is “to grow awareness by embracing our hair, which many cancer patients lose” as well as donating the money the person would have spent on shaving and grooming to one of the three organizations they support each year. However, I am fairly certain that most of the young males do not know about the whole donating part and participate because they have the excuse to grow a beard and not groom for a month. Women can also participate in No-Shave November by not shaving areas of their bodies like armpits or legs and donate their money as well. In high school, I played basketball (I was not very good, but I was on the team) and both years I played my team participated in No-Shave November by not shaving our legs. Some of us caved and did anyways, but it was a bonding experience for the team. However, when any of us mentioned it outside of

the basketball court or locker room, people would look at us a little strange. There was more social stigma around girls growing out their leg hair which wasn't visible during school hours anyways (because in Minnesota you have to wear pants in November) than there was for the boys' team (which only one or two of them could even grow any sort of facial hair). The ironic thing about hair is that women are expected to have a lot of it, but only on their heads and nowhere else. For men, it doesn't really matter. They can be as hairy or as un-hairy as they want to be.

Hair is a cultural technology as the hidden rules of it dictate how people view others in light of how they wear their hair. This paper is a more in-depth look into the hidden agenda of cultural technology of hair, but it is not an exhaustive list by any means. These are merely observations that I have made, and I limited it to my own scope of knowledge. Hair is not only a cultural technology in the United States, but all around the world. Each country seems to have different hidden rules when it comes to hair which solidified hair as a cultural technology not just in the United States but throughout the world.



Works Cited

*No-Shave November*. No-Shave November.org, 2019, <https://no-shave.org>. Accessed March 10, 2020.