

**WOMEN'S STUDIES CELEBRATION**  
Women's History Month 2005

**NOMINATION: Papers and projects done in completion of course work for Spring, Summer and Fall 2004 eligible for nomination. Students do not need to be enrolled Fall 2004 or Spring 2005 to be eligible.**  
(Students are encouraged to identify works they would like nominated and approach their professor to initiate the process.)

Instructor SUSAN C TURELL Dept. WMNS/PSYC  
Course Number and Name PSYC 336 Semester completed Fall 04  
Title of Nominated Work Women having body hair

**CATEGORY:** Sampson:  
Undergraduate Research Paper  See   
Undergraduate Project  Olson   
Graduate  Kessler   
 Turell   
 Belter

**STUDENT INFORMATION:**  
Name Jennifer Stafslin  
Email STAFSLJR Year/Major nursing / junior  
Local Address \_\_\_\_\_  
Local Phone \_\_\_\_\_

**\*\*WHY DO YOU, THE INSTRUCTOR, RECOMMEND THIS AS AN EXEMPLARY STUDENT PAPER/PROJECT? (Attach a separate sheet.)**

As the nominating instructor, please notify the student and ask them to turn in the paper, or attach to your nomination form.

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**Awards are sponsored by the UW-Eau Claire Foundation, Helen X. Sampson Fund, and by private individuals. Research involving human subjects must conform to the guidelines given by the Institutional Research Board. Contact Research Services, 836-3405, with questions.**

**Submission deadline is February 11, 2005.**

TO: WMNS Awards Committee Judges

FROM: Susan C. Turell

January 26, 2005

I am pleased to nominate Jennifer Stafslie's paper "Women having body hair" for a WMNS 2005 award. She completed this project for my Psychology of Women class, as a gender role reversal. I think that Jennifer did an outstanding job of both documenting her own experience in challenging the gender rules about hair, but also tied her experience to the larger context of the history and research about body hair and gender. Further, she made astute observations about how hair (or lack of it) is tied to a feminist analysis of power relations between men and women. I believe her paper is a fine example of how feminist theory and research can be applied to one's life and to create a new understanding of being a woman in a patriarchal society.

**Running Head: WOMEN HAVING BODY HAIR**

**A Gender-Role Reversal**

**Women having Body Hair**

**Jennifer Staflien**

**University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire**

Man and woman are clearly different. This statement has been proven in many ways both psychologically and physically. The question is what differences are purely biological and what differences are stereotypically brought about from society? Psychological differences are not as easy to analyze as physical differences between a man and a woman; therefore, I have chosen to look at one main physical attribute that can easily be measured objectively, body hair. The most distinctive physical attribute that is different between a man and a woman to me is body hair. Facial hair, leg hair, armpit hair, feet hair, and now even genital hair are all parts of a woman's body that are now looked at as being repulsive. Women are stereotyped today as being attractive only if their skin is smooth, silky, and hairless while men can grow bushes over their entire face. My main objective for this assignment was to see the reactions of society when I, a young college woman, chose to show off my biologically given hairy body. After completing this very lengthy test, I want to now explain the following: the process I went through of growing out the hair that I had so long shaven; the reactions I received from my closest friends, family, teammates, and strangers, the internal struggle that I faced with body image, and the lessons I learned through my experience.

As I began the process of growing out my body hair I was very skeptical on how I was going to feel about my body image. I, having shaved my legs, armpits, and toes since I was twelve and then my arms when I was sixteen, was scared to see how hairy my body would be once it all came back. I started this process October 12, 2004 and have still to this day not shaved my legs, arms, or toes. I shaved my armpits a week ago because I could not handle the inability of my deodorant to work from all my hair. The first week was not bad because my hair did not grow very much. The second week,

however, was horror. I itched like crazy. I had black prickly hairs all over my legs, arms, and armpits. My boyfriend especially had problems adjusting to my hair because it would itch him when we would lie together. He was not exactly a big fan of this process. I asked him if it were because I was not attractive to him or if it was really just because it made him itch. He, knowing the reason to why I was not shaving, said it was only because it made him itch.

As my hair grew out to a quarter of a centimeter I began to feel embarrassed when I wore shorts at practice. The girls were all huddled around me saying how gross it was and everyone wanted to feel my legs. I was a human specimen at track practice. Although most girls were appalled by my hair, my roommate, being the feminist that she is, decided she was going to do the same thing! This made me feel less isolated because now I had someone to relate to.

As my hair progressed on to grow longer and became softer, word got out to the men's track team and it just so happens that they practice at the same time the women do. I began seeing eyes looking at my legs. A couple of my guy friends came over to get an up close and personal. Without surprising me, they were appalled by the appearance. They made jokes to my boyfriend, who is also on the track team, about how lucky he was to get to feel my legs. I became the laughing stock of the men's track team for the next three weeks.

My biggest test was the day of competition. We had a mini track meet with some schools in our region for a pre-season get together where every athlete competes in an event of their choice. This does not sound bad until I mention that we wear underwear for a uniform. I, having not shaved my legs nor my bikini line in a month and a half, had

to wear underwear in front of not only my teammates who knew why I was not shaving, but now there were friends from other schools, strangers, and family members that were going to see my unshaven body. I picked up my razor at least twenty times the week before the meet. I wanted so badly to shave because I was mortified of what people were going to think. I succeeded in staying away from the razor because, sadly, to say my roommate finally hid all of them. As I warmed up for competition that day I was so self-conscious I was contemplating not competing. As I took off my warm-ups and exposed my hairy legs I did not notice a whole lot of people looking at me; however, when I finished my race and was stretching with my buns on a lot of girls were staring at my legs. I talked to a few and felt like I had to tell them right away why I had not shaved! I was conforming to society's stereotype by telling them that I knew it was gross and that I could not wait to shave. I really cannot wait because I do feel very unattractive and dirty with hair on my legs. I think it is because I am used to having smooth legs and now I prefer smooth over hairy legs. It could also very well be from how I was raised to believe that hair is gross on women. That stereotype is so imbedded in me that I think it is really what I am biologically supposed to look like. I am waiting until Christmas now to shave my legs and arms so I can disgust my brother when I see him.

The stereotype that women were to have little to no hair on their body stems back all the way to the 1920s. "During the 1920s, an increasing proportion of magazine ads emphasized the importance of appearance for women in order to ensure [her mate's] fidelity in particular and home security in general," (Ewen, p. 177, 1996, cited in Bartlett & Franesca, 1999). As I read through the literature on woman with hairless bodies I continually saw the word "femininity," next to the word "hairless." Women having

hairless bodies have not always been the fad for beauty; however, before 1915 women did not shave hair on their body (Basow, 1991). This could be due to the fact that the clothing style was based on full coverage; therefore, little skin was shown. The only women that were known to shave were dancers because they exposed a large amount of skin (Basow, 1991). Saying that, does this mean that if a woman chose to wear revealing clothing that she would have to shave the hair on her body? This would conclude that hair was merely for appearance and had nothing to do with physical touch or arousal. If women did not shave their legs back in the day unless they were revealed, then sexually their partner must have not thought anything of the hair on his partner's legs.

Advertisements for The Gillette Company had slogans stating their new razor was for women's "smooth and bare" neck. The language states men shaving and women smoothing (Barlett & Fransesca, 1999). Hair removal started with only the armpits and then moved to the legs after short stockings, to cover up the leg hair, were unavailable because of the war. Eventually, hair on any part of a woman's body was considered unattractive and shaving was part of her personal hygiene.

This stereotype relates to the psychology of women when you look back to how this trend started. The literature does not show specifically how hairlessness became a beauty marker for women; however, it does show gradual advertisements of women showing more and more skin without the presence of hair. Overall, this body image came about when women were looked at as being objects to men. As I mentioned before, women were to be as attractive to men as much as possible in order to keep their husbands faithful and to hold on to a secure home (Basow, 1991). During the 1920s the majority of jobs were held by males, meaning that advertisement companies were

androcentrically based. Magazines portrayed a beautiful woman with having smooth and hairless skin when revealed; therefore, this gave women the idea that they must shave in order to be beautiful to men (Mondry, 2004).

Going through this process and reading the literature on how women with hairless bodies came about, I have learned not only a lot about society but also myself. After experiencing the negative self-image of being a gross specimen to my friends, family, teammates, and strangers, I have learned how important acceptance is to me. I would like to say that I do not care about what other people think, but as I went about this process I progressively felt worse about myself as people began staring at my body with disgust. Society has imbedded a stereotype that has labeled women as being attractive without hair; therefore, a woman who chooses to live life with her biologically given hairy body, is unattractive or has poor hygiene. I was the average woman and could not go outside societies stereotypes because I could not handle the disapproval.

As I analyze the importance of having a hairless body I also look at how women are viewed as being unattractive if they do not have hair on their head. It is alright for men to go bald or even to shave their head but if a woman were to do that she would be considered unattractive and some would even go to the point of calling her a lesbian. So the stipulations seem to be that women must have a full head of hair but no hair any other place on her body. A man, on the other hand, can have a full head of hair, no hair at all, or hair where ever he pleases throughout his body. Doesn't this just go to show how women are constantly looked at as objects and how men have more power? Men are considered attractive with whatever "hair style," they choose. Women, on the other hand, are unattractive if they have hair on one part of their body or no hair on another!



Throughout this process I have learned what a great deal body image plays on a woman's self-worth due to the reactions she gets from society. In order for women to become independent, autonomous, successful, and equal to men in all aspects of their life, things such as body image must change. If a woman is constantly criticized on her appearance, her self-worth will only go down, which could in turn hinder her success in other areas of her life in the future. To fix this problem, women should be able to have hair where ever they choose. Women can no longer be objects to men. They must be an equal partner in every area of life. Body hair is only one stigma of a woman's appearance that has arisen over the past hundred years. The only solution that I see to overcoming this stereotype and many more is to not judge one another on physical appearance. A person is only beautiful by what they have on the inside not the outside. Every individual must find that beauty within themselves, which is something I have learned through this process that I must work on.

## Reference

- Bartlett, F. & Franesca, H. (1999). Clean, White Girls: Assimilation and women's work. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 25, pp. 10-29.
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