Chapter 9

Well-beshaved Women Rarely Make History – Exploring the Contestation of the Hairless Beauty Ideal with Case #Januhairy

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Introduction

Close your eyes and imagine the sound of an accelerating motorcycle continued with Princess Nokia's assertive lyrics: 'Who that is, ho? That girl is a tomboy' (Nokia & Ramirez, 2017). The forceful vocals are accompanied with feminine soft pastel aesthetics: pink fuzzy slippers, women looking at you with bedroom eyes, stroking their bristly legs and underarm hair with content. Does this sound like a feminist utopia, where women can sport their unibrows freely and decide what to do with their hairy legs, bushy bikini lines, woolly underarms or downy bellies for themselves? Not quite. It illustrates a commercial for the company Billie that sells products for body hair removal by saying 'Whatever you decide to do with your body hair, we're here'. There are also other examples of brands (again, razors) using feminist discourses on their commodities, stressing the optionality of something that is often connected tightly with feminists' appearances: body hair. However, this time the removal of body hair is associated with self-love, and branding the products as pain-free, vegan or environmentally friendly to make them appealing to a particular niche: cool consumers with a feminist orientation. Similarly, what is called the 'hairless beauty ideal' or the 'hairlessness norm' is now contested in social media campaigns by posting aestheticised pictures of hairy female bodies. How did something that used to be 'dreaded otherness' become a hot and sexy trend?

This chapter approaches the contradictory nature of female body hair with the scholarship of the hairlessness norm. We expand it to the theory of aesthetic

capital, which in this chapter can be understood as context-dependent physical appearance, which also has ideological significance. Even though body hair bears a negative value in broader society, it can help accruing assets that are appreciated in a certain field, among social media activists. Appropriately manifesting this local cultural capital can be used to gain, for example, social capital (friends, followers and likes), but also turned into economic capital (paid collaborations, representing certain brands). We investigate how the hairlessness norm is challenged by studying participants and commentators who took part in the Januhairy movement. Using content analysis, we elaborate the images and captions under the #januhairy posted on Instagram during 2019 and 2020, and the comments these posts received. This chapter aims to explore, first, how the hairlessness norm is contested in an online context, and second, how the commentators respond to this contestation.

We will start by presenting theoretical literature on the norms related to female body hair. We move on to describe how activism in general takes form in social media platforms and how it is related to commodity feminism. Next, we introduce our research questions, data and methods, results and finally, a discussion and our conclusions.

Background

The (Un)hairy Female Body

Women's unruly bodies have been normatively governed by beauty ideals throughout the ages. One example of these gendered beauty ideals is the 'hairlessness norm' (e.g. Basow, 1991; Tiggemann & Kenyon, 1998; Tiggemann & Lewis, 2004; see also Widdows, 2018). This norm demands women to remove the hair on, for example, their legs and underarms to appear feminine and aesthetically appealing, and thus, avoid the social stigma of 'dreaded otherness' (Fahs, 2011), followed by others' shame and disgust. In this approach, making oneself attractive by body hair removal is not just a choice but also a mandate, one communicated by not only women's parents and friends but also strangers, coworkers and friends of friends.

The norms regarding body hair have been addressed since the 1960s. Since those times, it has been considered the 'last taboo' (Lesnik-Oberstein, 2006; Smelik, 2015), something that is not discussed openly and needs to be challenged. By far, the majority of women in Western countries follow this practice (Herzig, 2015; Lesnik-Oberstein, 2006). This results in seeing body hair removal as commonplace and everyday behaviour for most women, who do not question its origin or necessity. However, the extent of removal has increased in time: nearly complete hair removal is becoming more common for younger women (e.g. Tiggemann & Hodgson, 2008), and simultaneously, associated with cleanliness and respect for sexual partners (e.g. Basow, 1991; Fahs, 2011).

It is important to keep in mind that despite hair growing all over the body, only some zones of hair bear social significance and raise popular interest. Hair has gendered and ideological significance as it represents the 'oppositeness' of the

sexes. For example, while long hair represents ultimate ideal beauty on female bodies, on male bodies it represents the opposite (Synnott, 1987). Moreover, as unshaved legs or bikini lines are considered 'excessive' and thus unfeminine and repulsive, the very same hair represents ultimate masculinity on men's bodies. Following this, common reasons for removing body hair include the willingness to appear sexually attractive and desirable (e.g. Tiggemann & Hodgson, 2008; Tiggemann & Lewis, 2004). For example, women internalise ideas about their bodies as central to 'proper' femininity and become other-directed, concerned about the male gaze and oriented toward the heterosexual dating market. As the hairlessness norm is so pervasive, deviations from the norms are extremely powerful. Hairy legs, unplucked eyebrows and axillary hair are symbols of feminism and egalitarian ideology. Similarly, removing this hair is seen as a symbol of traditional gender roles. Synnott (1987) concluded that a woman's body hair signifies one's commitment to feminism, which makes the hair a political statement. Therefore, the body (with or without hair) is not only a political symbol but also political in itself.

The unquestionability of body hair removal can be linked to capitalist patriarchy and how this 'last taboo' is silenced still today. This injustice could be overcome by showing body hair exists and using the feminist critical practice as a deconstructive strategy by exposing the reasons behind these practices (Lesnik-Oberstein, 2006). In her writing, Lesnik-Oberstein (2006) also refers to the female body as something that is described as 'lacking' in patriarchal societies: lacking masculine presence and thus created feminine with culturally and socially specified manners (e.g. hair removal, dieting, makeup). In contrast, male bodies 'exist' without being forced to achieve their 'maleness'. To fulfil societal ideals of femininity, women disguise and conceal their 'natural' bodies and undergo a vast array of these bodily modifications, procedures, grooming habits and maintenance behaviours to conform to social norms of proper femininity. Moreover, another societal norm is embedded within body hair removal practices: the social maintenance of heterosexuality, or *appearing* heterosexual, and adhering to the body practices accompanying this norm (Nielsen et al., 2000). Indeed, body hair is something that in previous research has been associated with lesbian aesthetics and queer culture (e.g. Basow, 1991). Turning this thought the other way around, appropriating these non-normative gender performances and further aestheticising them can also be seen as investing in 'queer glamor' (Branfman, 2019).

When assessing the norms' strength and the possibility for resisting these norms, it is important to recognise that individuals do not choose the prevailing beauty ideals. Individuals can choose the extent to which they conform to them, but the extent to which this can be done is also limited by the dominance of the ideal. Moreover, women who do succeed in rejecting and resisting the beauty ideal either do so at a significant cost and effort, or they are protected from the costs of nonconformity by membership in a community that endorses some other competing beauty ideal or other ideals that oppose the dominant beauty ideal. These communities are increasingly rare and often privileged (Widdows, 2018). However, it must be taken into account that non-obedience to existing beauty ideals can also benefit some individuals. Giselinde Kuipers's (2015) study on

different taste repertoires and physical appearance confirmed that the more educated, younger, metropolitan informants prefer a beauty that is 'interesting' or 'authentic', defining their cultural capital. This confirms the possibility for only privileged individuals or groups to successfully aestheticise appearances that are considered subordinate in broader society or contest the prevailing norms and ideals.

Activism and Commodity Culture in Social Media

Today, social media is an inherent part of many everyday lives (See Åberg & Koivula, Chapter 7 in this book). It is also an important platform for activism (See Puhakka, Chapter 8 in this book). The contemporary media culture, and particularly in social media environments, have become the primary site for social movements and selfies established as a dominant practice of resisting bodily norms (e.g. Gill & Elias, 2014) and hetero-normativity (e.g. Tiidenberg, 2014). The movements, such as body positivity, challenge contemporary society's narrow beauty ideals and the visibility of bodies that do not fit mainstream beauty norms (Sastre, 2016). Through sharing and viewing selfies, the narrow standards of appearances are questioned, consumerist aspects of visual economy are rejected and thus control over the aesthetics of bodies is (re)claimed (Tiidenberg & Gomez-Cruz, 2015). In an article about portraying ageing femininities on Instagram, Tiidenberg (2018) considers selfie practices expanding community members' understanding of what Bourdieu and Whiteside (1996, p. 6) has referred to as 'photographable and unphotographable' about (women's) bodies.

Social media platforms have been widely used for different 'social movements', for example, movements such as 'Movember' and 'Decembeard' that focus on celebrating the male facial hair and simultaneously raise funds and awareness on prostate cancer or colon cancer. More recently, a movement called 'Januhairy' concentrated on reducing the stigma of women's natural hair growth and empowers its participants by encouraging them to explore how it feels to be *au naturel*. From well-known and large-numbered movements, such as 'Veganuary' or perhaps the more unfamiliar 'Masturbation May', the participation in any movement these days seems to be made easily achievable by packing them neatly as a 30-day experiment. This new lifestyle is reported occasionally, if not daily, by using the agreed hashtag devoted to reporting thoughts on the experiment or the results of the progress. Research on social media has found that women were more likely to have used social networking sites for a number of years. However, at the present day, women and men use social media at similar rates (Perrin, 2015). This previous gap may have implications for social movements, enabling women to become involved in social movements that they find thematically interesting as well as being more accustomed to sharing and discussing online personally relevant topics.

Thus, corroborating the previous claims, sharing pictures of hairy female bodies may expand the perception of female body parts that are worthy of being photographed, as well as resist the gender norms by aestheticising those 'forbidden' and othered parts. The fundamental aim of previously presented

one-month-long social movements was to challenge the prevailing norms of, for example, femininity or acceptable bodies. However, the process of deciding what is worth photographing is indissociable from the system of values it claims autonomy from, more specifically, social class or profession.

Marketers and advertisers establish, follow and participate in these movements as well, trying to figure out the next big thing in modern capitalism and snoop around for customer values that could be turned into profits. This process has been described by coining the term 'commodity feminism' (Goldman et al., 1991), referring to the way feminist ideals and icons (such as Princess Nokia song or body hair) are appropriated for commercial purposes. Simultaneously, the practices are emptied of their political significance and offered back to the public in a commodified form – usually in advertising, as was the case of 'feminist razors' presented earlier in this chapter. Thus, the driving force of commodity culture lies in attaching disparate meanings to generate new sign values. In this context, feminism is a look, a sense of style or an established or a recognisable brand that signifies those values. The rise of commodified feminism has been distinguishable in modern consumer culture for quite some time, as chain stores such as H&M have started to sell clothing with feminist statements (e.g. Repo, 2020).

Research Questions

In the theory section, we have established firstly that the hairlessness norm is pervasive in modern society, despite it having been addressed for years. We have also found that social media is a perfect medium for questioning the prevailing appearance norms through user-created visual imagery, mainly selfies, that are also a central element of the studied Januhairy movement. Through these theoretical lenses, we ask: (1) How is the hairlessness norm challenged through images and texts in the Januhairy movement in social media? (2) How do people respond to these posts?

Data and Methods

Case #Januhairy

To study how the hairlessness norm is contested in online environments, we searched for publicly available content hashtagged with #januhairy on Instagram. This hashtag was part of a social media project created by a drama student, Laura Jackson. She started the project in January 2019 to encourage women to challenge social norms by going *au naturel* with their body hair for (at least) one month (Mettler, 2019). By May 2020, the page had over 33,000 followers and the hashtag had been included in 9,814 posts.

While browsing the content, we found connections between other hashtags centred on reducing body hair stigma, such as #noshamenoshave and #bodyhairdontcare, or hashtags related to the body positivity movement such as #effyourbeautystandards. The majority of the posts had one thing in common: the imagery uses sexualisation as a strategy for opposing gendered beauty-related

norms regarding body hair, but does not necessarily make verbal references to sexiness per se. Moreover, the objecting hashtags were often presented simultaneously with hashtags of famous brands, like Victoria's Secret or Ellesse swimsuits, attaching their feminist agenda to these brands. Another interpretation could be that the women wanted these brands usually associated with beautiful women with sexy bodies to be 'infected' with new meanings.

The images had distinctive features in other ways as well. Some of the people with more popular profiles did not just portray themselves casually with body hair, but instead were including extra layers to their hairy online performances. They were, for example, colouring their body hair with rainbow colours, which occasionally seemed even more time consuming than traditional shaving. Some of the participants were capturing their body hair in various environments, like forests and moors or presenting their body hair 'on the move', adding splits or yoga poses to their images to express other bodily capitals.

Study Sample

We gathered selfies posted under the hashtag #januhairy on Instagram that were written in English and initially posted by the holders of the accounts themselves, i.e. not reposted by other users or accounts. We randomly selected 100 pictures from those posted under the hashtag between January 2019 and June 2019.

Each post was posted by a different public account. After excluding duplicates, posts that were not available during the time we conducted the analysis in August 2020, and posts that included only a photo with no story attached, we were left with an analytical sample of 67 posts. Next, we asked each user for permission to use the user's photo and post in our study. In total, 21 users gave permission to analyse their photos, and a total of 34 users gave permission to analyse the captions and comments they had received to their post. Lastly, from the comments, we excluded duplicates and comments that were tagging other users without any content (e.g. @profile), resulting in 581 comments.

Ethical Considerations

All study subjects were asked for permission to analyse their photo and the story and comments attached to it. To ensure the privacy of our study subjects, we do not reference account URLs, user names or reproduce any images in this study. All the collected research materials will be deleted after this study is published.

Using hashtags is a part of the so-called attention economy on Instagram (Marwick, 2015) and makes it a publicly visible part of online body hair activism in ways that private or non-hashtagged accounts are not. It is important to note that the data are based on publicly visible and based on accounts that have decided to use hashtags, thus we do not claim to speak for all depictions of body hair on Instagram let alone outside the platform. It is likely that there would be private accounts, or public accounts, where they simply do not use hashtags, and thus are missed in this research. It is possible that including these accounts

would have shown a wider range of themes and discursive elements than those presented here.

Methods

To study how the hairlessness norm was challenged by the Januhairy movement in social media, we conducted two analyses. In the first analysis, we used visual content analysis to search for key themes rising from the 21 images. In the second analysis, we conducted a content analysis to study the themes arising from the captions attached to the images ($n = 34$). To investigate how people responded to these images, we conducted a third analysis, where we used content analysis to study the comments ($n = 581$) the images ($n = 21$) received.

Content Analysis

Content analysis is an exploratory empirical method that can be described as 'a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use' (Krippendorff, 2004). It can be applied to textual or visual content.

We followed Bengtsson's (2016) described content analysis process. This process is divided into four phases: decontextualisation, recontextualisation, categorisation and compilation. In the *contextualisation* phase, each identified meaning unit is labelled with a code that is related to the context. A meaning unit refers to the constellation of words or statements that relate to the same central meaning, such as words, sentences or paragraphs that share aspects related to each other (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004.). A researcher must choose to code either for manifest or latent content. The manifest content is explicit in an object (such as actual words) whereas latent content refers to more 'hidden' categories that rise from the text. The latter involves interpreting the text's underlying meaning, which is what we chose to use in this study. Next, in the *recontextualisation* phase, the original text is re-read with the list of meaning units. Then, in the *categorisation* process, themes and categories are identified. The procedure in this phase varies, depending on whether a manifest analysis or a latent analysis is used. In this study, we used latent content analysis. Thus, the categories are traditionally referred to as themes in the latent analysis. A theme is an expression of the text's latent content. A meaning unit or category can fit into more than one category. Lastly, the *compilation* phase refers to the analysis and writing-up process.

To answer our first research question, we analysed the posts' written captions to study how the users seek to challenge the norms regarding body hair using online platforms. Using the total analytical sample, we coded and thematised the posts' written captions for the emergence of recurring themes and sub-themes. We used latent content analysis to examine how people commented on these posts. The analysis revealed two main themes and several sub-themes related to whether body hair is considered an acceptable or non-acceptable act, and thus, whether it could act as a form of capital.

Visual Content Analysis

The method of (visual) content analysis aims to count 'the frequency of certain visual elements in a clearly defined population of images and then analysing those frequencies' (Rose, 2016, p. 88). Each aspect of this process has certain requirements to achieve replicable and valid results.

We analyse this imagery, firstly, to see who is participating in this project and secondly, to understand what kind of visual and textual strategies are used in these posts. Finally, we explore how the content is textually framed and how the content is commented on. Visual Content analysis has been used previously for studying #fitspiration posts (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2018) and ageing femininities (Tiidenberg, 2018) on Instagram.

Results

Challenging the Norms?

Six themes arose from the visual content analysis and each photo could fall under multiple themes (Table 1). All 21 images were posted by females, around 15–30 years of age. Most images were of slender and white women showing their underarm hair. Most images were selfies exposing a hairy armpit and included the person's face, three images were taken of a hairy leg and three of only armpit with no full face. Over half of the images represent a theme: 'slim', 'aesthetic' and 'white.' Aesthetic points to the artisticness of the photo – the person in the photo wore makeup or fancier clothes, posed in a photogenic position and/or the lightning and colours of the photo were edited. In almost half of the pictures, the person incorporated typical Western beauty standards, i.e. thin, but feminine, firm, smooth and young (e.g. Widdows, 2018).

From the captions, we found eight themes (Table 2). Five captions were impossible to categorise into any of these themes either due to very short text. Most posts commented on #januhairy or the movement around female body hair directly (55.9%), while 44.1% of the posts did not comment on the movement at all. Around 23–29% of the captions described how empowering they felt taking part in this movement, discussed the importance of self-acceptance and the unnecessary shamefulness traditionally attached to female body hair. Some (23.5%) also underlined that female body hair is natural. Around 15% posted a photo of their body hair without giving any clear 'statement' on female body hair.

Table 9.1. The Names and Quantities of the Themes of the Images ($N = 21$).

	Slim	Aesthetic	White	Beauty	Feminine
N	20	18	17	9	9
%	95.2	85.7	81.0	42.9	42.9

Table 9.2. The Names and Quantities of the Themes Rising from the Captions.

	Does Not Comment	Brave/ Confident/ Empowering	Self-acceptance	Natural	Shame	Other's Acceptance	Doesn't Emphasize Hair	Other
N	15	10	9	8	8	8	5	5
%	44.1	29.4	26.5	23.5	23.5	23.5	14.7	14.7

Approval or Disapproval?

We explored how the images of female body hair were commented on. In total, out of the 581 comments, around 93% were categorised as positive ($N = 542$) and only a minority of the comments were negative ($N = 39$). This generally positive reception indicates that at least these users were not punished for challenging the beauty norms. Interestingly, one post received more negative comments than others, as one person of colour received a long message including multiple swastikas (Fig. 9.1).

We found four main themes under the 'positive' category (Table 3). Around 36.3% of all the positive comments, commented that the photo, its content or the user who posted it was 'beautiful' or 'lovely', or they commented only with a heart emoji. Of the total comments, 25.1% were generally positive and encouraging, while 17.4% commented on the 'sexiness' or 'attractiveness' of the user, her body hair or the picture. This category also included those who only posted emojis such

Fig. 9.1.   Wordcloud Form the Comments According to the Themes 'Positive' Comments (Left) and 'Negative' Comments (Right).

Table 9.3. The Names and Quantities of the Sub-themes Rising from the Comments.

	Positive						Negative		
	Natural and Normal 1	Sexy 2	Proud and Brave 3	Beautiful 4	Encouraging 5	Other	Unhygienic	Gross	Other
Total N	55	101	103	216	146	35	3	14	21
Total %	9.5	17.4	17.7	37.2	25.1	6.0	0.5	2.4	3.6

Codes for the themes: 1 Natural, healthy, normal, 2 Sexy/attractive/goddess/tongue, kissing or drooling smiley, 3 BeYourSelf/Brave/Proud/Queen, Yass, Amen, 4 beautiful/lovely/only heart emoji, 5 Encouraging emojis or comments that cannot be categorised into other categories.

as drooling smiley or a tongue. Around 18% praised the user of being 'brave' or 'encouraging'. This category also included comments like 'queen', 'yass', 'praise it' or 'tell them sis' that can be interpreted as encouraging comments with an idea of being 'proud and brave' (Branfman, 2019). Of the comments, 9.5% were either pointing out that female body hair is 'natural', 'healthy' or 'normal'. The category 'other' mainly consisted of neutral comments that were not clearly categorisable, for example, posts asking for permission to share the photo.

From the negative comments, we discovered two main themes: unhygienic and gross. However, only a couple of the comments pointed out that not shaving is unhygienic. The rest (the 'other' category) consisted mainly of comments such as 'no' or 'ridiculous'.

Discussion

Who Can Contest the Hairlessness Norm?

At first glance, despite the alleged inclusiveness of the Januhairy movement, the imagery generated in the project is young, thin, white and 'pretty'. It seems that while the photographs aimed to broaden the norms of performing femininity, they responded to what the traditional male gaze (for objectification theory, see Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) or what the postfeminist girlfriend gaze (Winch, 2013), portraying the women as objects to be looked at, constructing their self-worth on how other people see them. Otherwise, participants seemed to represent the demographics of Instagram and were in line with the prevailing Western beauty standards: young, white and slim. The content also revealed that it seems possible only to contest one norm at a time.

Some of the visual imagery could also be interpreted as 'commodity feminism'. The uploaded content was made 'Instagrammable' and aestheticised the body hair. Uploading this kind of visual imagery on Instagram is challenging the

hairlessness norm by portraying body hair in a new light: not affecting one's sexiness, or even improving one's looks by daring to look different.

The themes found in the captions and in the comments were mostly over-lapping. One explanation for this is that possibly most of the comments were written by like-minded followers. Many of those who posted a story under the #januhairy also commented on other posts under this tag. Both captions and comments often discussed how female body hair is natural and should be more acceptable in today's society. Many also described the shame they had experienced before taking part of this social movement and how they had grown to accept themselves during this hair-growing period. Similarly, many comments discussed these same topics.

An interesting contradiction between the themes found in the captions and in the comments was about sexualisation. While no captions wrote about sexuality, it was one of the most common themes among the comments. Some users and commentators were annoyed by the number of comments that fetishised and sexualised the user's female body hair. However, since these were the first posts under #januhairy, it is possible that the later posted captions commented on the sexualisation. Also, it is possible that we are socialised to interpret young girls showing their underarms sexually alluring, or that a pose of lifting one's arm gets interpreted as sexual even if it is accompanied by something that contrasts the prevailing social norms regarding physical appearance.

The uploaded content was obviously seen by at least two different groups with different interests. In essence, the group of emerging cultural capitalists with similar taste patterns, shared aesthetics and feminist agenda, but also a community of body hair fetishists, who might use the content differently than intended by the person posting it. An example of the gradual (male) appreciation of the naturalness of the female body can be found in the following comment:

> I have just discovered your page and it is all beautiful, also...I'm just going to go ahead and say something that will probably make me very unpopular. I personally can no longer find women who shave their bodies attractive. I've always had a love for natural women...at first just the lower regions, then armpits became something I accepted...and now, a women with hair in all the places it grows is far more attractive to me than a woman who wears societies [*sic*] fake mask of 'beauty' never ever be ashamed. #Bareshaveisboring

However, women's body hair is seen as something that needs to be accepted either by society or by men, while no interest is laid on women's own experiences. Despite employing a discourse of naturalness and referring to a fake mask of beauty, it seems that this comment encourages women to free their bodies for men to enjoy, paying little attention to what women themselves want.

While most women received affirmations, refusing to shave body hair was considered unhygienic or disgusting by some commentators. It seems that it is not only about women shaving their body hair or photographing themselves but also

social media encourages people to comment on each other's appearance. This reduces women to being equal to their appearance and intensifies the ugly– beautiful spectrum that others define. On one end of the spectrum is an empowered hairy lady who has 'chosen' this stigmatised appearance and is otherwise so beautiful that body hair does not diminish that beauty. On the other end of this spectrum is a woman socially deemed less appealing, pressured to shave her body hair to avoid the social stigma of being possibly interpreted as 'monstrous, grotesque, disgusting, aggressive, antisocial and mad' (Lesnik-Oberstein, 2006).

The construction of a similar spectrum was apparent especially in the negative comments that mainly focused on one post. The person had an open profile and approximately as many followers as the other selected posts, but somehow she had received more negative commentary than the others. It might be that she perhaps aesthetically represented a more 'girl next door', one who is ordinary looks. In addition to vomiting emojis, the commentators accused her of being a cliché, and not shaving being already tested by feminists and proven absurd: 'This new age feminism is ridiculous...' and '...shave your fucking pits'. It seemed that body hair was seen even as a personal attack towards gender order, and it should be stopped immediately by telling them about this issue's ridiculousness. The alleged naturalness of body hair was also conflated with not showering and being dirty. It seems that these negative comments are mostly in line with Leslik-Obestein's (2006) previously presented interpretations about social stigmas attached to body hair.

Body Hair as Classed Aesthetics

Contesting traditional appearance norms and looking normatively less beautiful may also seem 'cool' in certain groups of people, more specifically among the urban young, as Giselinde Kuipers (2015) establishes in her study. Evidently, the participants under these hairy hashtags are negotiating their appearance norms, which act as a capital in their social world, young women with similar social background and similar taste patterns. However, appreciating body hair might also be an example of lessening pressure on women to hide their 'unruly' bodies, but also implies that 'female masculinity' (see also Halberstam, 1998) or 'queer glamour', as Branfman (2019) refers to it, may only be acceptable when packaged and presented in appealing ways.

Moreover, although the photos seem to dispute the norm, they do so conventionally. It seems that while contesting the prevailing norms, women are again endorsing another norm, i.e. reducing themselves to the visual. That visual ought to always stick to beauty norms or perform sexy to be acceptable, even when trying to fight the very same beauty norms. Secondly, the content focuses mainly on one part of the body, underarm hair, not all body hair, as some body hair might be less easily accepted (for example, a moustache). Furthermore, it seemed that it was possible only to contest one norm at the time. The participants seemed otherwise to conform to the demographics and the prevailing Instagram

beauty standards, that is young, slim and pretty. This sets the standards of hairy beauty high, making the standards as hard to attain as usual. Despite the good intentions, this might again cause appearance-related pressures, both inside and outside the activist group. This sets the beauty threshold higher, where only those who are cool enough for making a feminist statement, beautiful despite the hair or whose hair is aesthetic enough for being deemed as beautiful despite breaking the prevailing norm.

Capitalising the Dreaded Otherness?

It is evident that the 'capitalness' of body hair is situational and relational. This raises a question whether these are privileged young females who are allowed to expand societal perceptions of what is considered beautiful. Is body hair only allowed for those who have already accumulated other types of capital(s) and is body hair seen as only adding an intriguing nuance on their aesthetic capital (see also, Kuipers, 2015)?

In the future, it would be interesting to study how the visual presentations of body hair, the captions, the comments and the participants have further developed after this 'first wave'. People who participate in the first wave of social media movements tend to consist mostly of influencers and to some extent people familiar with the phenomenon. Further, later participants can consist of 'less-influential' people who the movement has encouraged. Another interesting point of a future study was influenced by the participants, who stressed the (occasionally sexual, but also other) content of the private messages they received, and the networks that are built between the commenters. Those inbox messages would be an interesting study as well.

Conclusion

With this chapter, we have focused on how the hairlessness norm is challenged in an online social movement, and how this challenge is received by online audiences. The results reveal that despite the aims of the Januhairy movement, such as inclusiveness and broadening the norms of performing femininity, the images the participants posted consisted of traditionally (in Western standards) 'beautiful' slim, white and young women. The analysis of the captions revealed that the users were knowingly challenging the hairlessness norm. The captions discussed the 'naturality' of female body hair and the importance of liberation from the shame imposed by family, the opposite sex and society. Most of the comments were encouraging and agreeing, discussing the same themes on naturalness, self-acceptance and liberation from the norms. However, a relatively large proportion of the comments discussed the sexiness of the female body hair, which was often not expected or welcomed by the posters.

Whether the participants were traditionally beautiful because they have 'less to lose' (as the social punishment for the non-obedience of the hairlessness norm is probably smaller for them than, for example, older, overweight and women of

colour), or because these demographics are also descriptive for this social media platform, remains unclear. However, when elaborating our results in the light of capital theory, it seems evident that body hair in itself cannot be considered as a form of capital, but becomes such by accentuating the already existing assets appreciated in this platform. Few possible explanations for body hair accentuating the existing forms of capital are that it makes its bearer more aesthetically arousing, ideologically similar by exhibiting a visible marker of feminist orientation or lastly, imposing a certain 'wildness', i.e. sexual uninhibitedness and promiscuity.

From the perspective of appearance-oriented society, our findings seem contradictory. On one hand, it seems that more fragmented looks have become appreciated and promoted in certain environments. On the other hand, it possibly broadens the surface area of the female body that has social significance and needs to become groomed in socially approved ways. Moreover, it can be seen as inducing an even more nuanced form of appearance related to inequality, as it simultaneously offers freedom of choice for hair removal for some and offers possible benefits for it. Simultaneously, this ambiguity makes the hairlessness norm even more pervasive for others, as it is even harder for others to grow or cultivate it the right way.

Acknowledgements

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