Why do I shave?
why

do I

shave?
Abstract

Visual aesthetics play a vital role in today’s Western society. We built up a society where physical appearance represents high values in our everyday life. Not only the way we consume things and engage with the internet have a connection to how we see and place ourselves in society but the way the system works and treats us. Under the word “system” I refer to the intertwined connection of patriarchy and capitalism. With this project, I explore this connection as well as how the system influences social norms, body aesthetics and acceptance. More specifically, I take shaving and myself as an example and examine the question of “Why do women shave?”. The representation of women in our current society shapes our idea and opinion on shaving therefore I work with questions such as: How are social norms created and how do they influence us? What are the ways to challenge and break these norms, if it is possible at all? How can our capacity for developing autonomy remain while being influenced by the system? My practice investigates these questions comprehensively and addresses the importance of discussions and the understanding of the roots of our behavior as well as how we as individuals contribute to the influence of society and the system.

Keywords

Body hair, patriarchy, capitalism, feminism, autonomy, gender and social norms, power relations

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# Table of contents

## 1.0 Theoretical framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Introduction</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Social norms</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 &quot;My body my norms&quot;</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Patriarchy and capitalism</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 Why do I shave?</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6 +Change</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## 2.0 Methodology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Collaboration with society</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 My hairy diary</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## 3.0 Design project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Visual research</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Relation to visual communication</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Experiment documentation</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Concept</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.1 Body hair</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.2 Paper making</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.3 Framing</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.4 Contrast</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5 Design decisions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.1 Binding</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.2 Printing</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.3 Typography and layout</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6 Contextualization</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7 Exhibition</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## 4.0 Conclusion                             | 35   |

## 5.0 Bibliography                           | 37   |

## 6.0 Addendum                                | 39   |
1.0 Theoretical framework
1.1 Introduction

Social norms form our lives unconsciously. How many things do we do daily that we wouldn’t do without the pressure of society? Have you ever thought of why marriage, having kids and owning a house is considered to be the perfect and fulfilled life in Western societies? Are these things giving us joy or is it just the social pressure that makes us think this is what we need? Society expects us to do certain things and we usually fail to see and accept if we have different needs. But why? Why do we all stand in the line surrendering to these social norms? Is there a way to break them?

We are all bound by social rules and we fail to realize the need for change. With this project, I am aiming to bring these problems to the surface within the topic of female body hair removal. As a change agent, I believe pushing the boundaries of social norms can create change in terms of bringing awareness about capitalism and how it is controlling us.

Exploring and breaking these norms is challenging for me as a person as I struggled with body hair issues when I was a teenager. I had much more body hair than most of the girls my age and it grew on parts of my body where it wasn’t considered to be “normal”. As a young girl, I didn’t know how to stand up for my own body, instead, I shaved everything off. Now, ten years later I see things differently. I see that shaving wasn’t my own decision but societal pressure and the need to fit into the norms. With this project, I am not only challenging myself but the social norms that surround this topic, as well as how patriarchy and capitalism influence women’s lives when it comes to defining their own femininity.

1.2 Social norms

Social norms are accepted behaviors in societies. There are many different ways people can influence our behavior, but the most significant is that the presence of others seems to set up expectations. We expect people to behave in certain ways in particular situations. Each social situation has its own “proper” way and how people expect us to behave (McLeod, 2008). The word norm is also synonymous to the concepts of “standard, model pattern or type” as stated by The Oxford English Dictionary in the text of Piia Korpi (2009). Shared patterns of behaving, feeling and thinking can be interpreted as norms, which in social situations can be pressured or pursued in order to conform to these. Gender norms such as shaving are setting up expectations differently for genders. In our current Western society, the hairlessness norm is considered to be portraying femininity. Judith Butler (2011), a post-structuralist philosopher and queer theorist who is most famous for her notion of gender performativity, in the video of Your
behavior creates your gender is describing that gender is performative. She states that being performative produces a series of effects. Gender is “a phenomenon that is being produced all the time and reproduced all the time” (ibid). So, to say gender is performative means nobody has really a gender from the start. I personally think her point is very thought-provoking and to think about gender as an ever-changing phenomenon is very unique. She adds as well that gender is culturally formed and is not an internal reality that is true about us. Therefore, women with their body hair should not be seen as masculine. There are normative ways of performing femininity and masculinity as Butler states in Korpi’s text (2009), however Butler warns us not to connect our notion of gender norms with them (ibid).

Separating the notion of gender from femininity and masculinity is creating a whole new perspective. As Butler separates these things we should as well separate body hair from gender. Hence, the state of being hairy won’t be connected to gender thereby masculine or feminine traits or behaviors won’t define ones sex. The adjectives feminine or masculine should be used ungendered for describing certain traits or behaviors. Following Butler’s thoughts I believe the words masculine and feminine became gendered in society. The use of these words and the traits and behaviors we identify with them set up expectations. Shaving is not an exception.

1.3 “My body my norms”

I have been working with the topic of social norms before in the form of a zine called “My body my norms” (2020). This project was part of a visual communication course on power relationships at Linnaeus University. The task given required us to explore power structures focusing on issues concerning (in)equality and social sustainability. Throughout the module, I broadened my understanding of how much power design has and how design decisions can influence us. The way the viewer engages with, understands or consumes our project is based on design decisions. This shows how much power designers have in their hands since they have the ability to affect, navigate and change people’s behavior, perspective or way of thinking. Working with the complexity of power relations made me recognize my own position in the world as a designer. I believe my role is not only to work with concerning issues but also to address these consciously by having a deep understanding of the topic.
WHY DO I SHAVE?

In the “My body my norms” project, I investigated time in looking at how society defines and shapes the “perfect” and “imperfect” image of female bodies. I dug deep into the field of femininity and looked at how the different body types are viewed and shaped by society. I was working with questions such as: Why do women strive for the “perfect” body and what does perfect mean to different people if it exists at all? Based on what do we define femininity and masculinity? What are the measurements we use? Why?

There is no such thing that is called the ideal body, as every person has different preferences, but there has been and there will always be a leading beauty standard that sweeps through society. Beauty standards exist because society supports them. Without even knowing or realizing it we are all part of the “making” where the gender norms are being created. In our current society, a hierarchical system is built up based on the physical appearance of women.

The embodiment of the ideal body differs from era to era. What society creates as the ideal body can be rooted in what that era places value on, such as religion, self, children etc (Hoffman, 2015). If you fall into the category of the current leading beauty standard, which in 2020 was someone with large breasts and butt with a flat stomach, society will likely accept and rank you high up on the hierarchical system. Whether we talk about racism, LGBTQ rights, reproductive justice, female body norms or any other social issues a big variety of power relations interconnect within these systems. If we look at the smaller picture women influence women, men influence women and men influence men, as simply put, but as we zoom out we see that all these power relationships are under the influence of larger systems. Capitalism and patriarchy play a huge role in the representation of women but we cannot understand the way these power relationships work unless we ask how people are connected to them and how these connections vary depending on race, gender, ethnicity, age and class (Johnson in Kirk and Okazawa-Rey’s book, 2004). All these layers of power are dependent on each other. “By participating in patriarchy we are of patriarchy and it is of us. Both exist through the other and neither can exist without the other” (ibid).
1.4 Patriarchy and capitalism

As Florence Given, a British feminist author, social activist and influencer is writing: “Different women experience different levels of expectation from society to perform femininity. [...] Marginalized women such as trans women, fat women and women of color don’t always have the privilege of ‘rejecting beauty standards’ such as growing out their armpit hair. [...] Real change doesn’t start until the people in the margins of our society are liberated and able to make the same decision (without discrimination) than thin, non-disabled, cisgender, white people can already make” (Given, 2020). Myself, as being thin white and cisgender I fall into the category of privileged women. I am aware of the privileges of my physical appearance which I didn’t choose to have. Such as women of color didn’t choose to participate in being discriminated. The system within which we exist creates problems and help to fuel discrimination. Why? Because capitalism is a profit-oriented system where financial growth has a crucial significance and is prioritized over human well-being. As Given is continuing the discussion in her book she states: “The mixed messages we receive about our bodies make us incredibly vulnerable to capitalism, as we are encouraged to buy solutions to fix our biological ‘flaws’” (Given, 2020). The constant reminder of being “imperfect” is not only creating oppression but also causing mental problems. However, capitalism has many more further reaching impacts than oppression and mental problems. Jonathan Nilsson (2020), a visual communicator who worked with the topic of degrowth in his artist book, is as well addressing the worries of capitalism when it comes to the question of profit or human well-being. Despite the fact that Nilsson is mainly arguing for the environmental impacts of capitalism and what the overproduction causes, we can clearly see the intertwined connections of the different spheres of sustainability, as capitalism doesn’t only destruct the environment but society. “All businesses try to increase sales, no matter what their products are there for” (ibid). By creating new problems in order to increase the sales of products, we believe we are not enough.

The practice of shaving has the same roots. In the 1900s women’s fashion industry, men’s hair removal industry and women’s magazine industry sought to profit from women’s new role as consumers (Women’s Museum of California, 2017). Showing off limbs in the changing fashion industry pressured women to shave their legs and armpits. In 1914 the first shaving advertisements were introduced by Harper’s Bazaar, the first razor brand for women. As shaved legs and armpits became more exposed Gillette stepped into the queue of women’s razor brands. Upcoming trends of the 1940s together with World War II made women shave more. The shortage of nylon meant that women were more likely to go without tights showing off their bare legs. This period prepared them for the new trends of the 1960s where mini-skirts came into fashion. We didn’t have to wait long for bikinis to appear which started the wave of shaving pubic hair (ibid). As we go in time more and more body parts are expected to be shaved. In the current Western society not only legs, armpits and pubic hair is expected to be removed but the hair on the arms, toes, butt, belly has to be gone too. A new razor brand Billie, founded in 2017, having photos of women shaving their toes (Billie, 2017). Even though the company is trying to promote body acceptance by being part of the not so many razor brands that show body hair in their advertisements, they are still trying to sell razors. To shave.
However, Billie is not the only company showing body hair in advertisements. Another young razor brand Estrid, founded in Sweden, is having the same approach to its marketing. They promote themselves as a sustainable vegan brand that is here for everyone who feels like shaving from time to time and for those who don’t too. Wait a second. Are these companies trying to sell razors but supporting not shaving? Upon closer examination, we can see it is all about profit and not human well-being. A company that represents sustainable manners, as well as portraying body acceptance looks appealing at first glance. But how can you sell razors and support not shaving? Estrid also states on their webpage: “Estrid was created as the solution to our own shave-care problems” (Westerbom, 2020). How can we make a change when body hair is still stated as a problem? Estrid, Billie and very likely other companies are brainwashing our society and offering solutions to problems that should not exist. Estrid does not only offer affordable and sustainable razors but a monthly subscription for razor blades. “Never run out of blades again!” (ibid). This is another choice on how to increase the sales and to make sure women will regularly buy the products. Sending the message of the constant need for razors gives the impression of irony. You get a razor blade to your door every month. What a necessity! As I see it, they encourage women to shave even more by offering an affordable monthly subscription. It’s all about profit and greenwashing since on top of the subscription they offer carbon-compensated shipping. Things packed and put in a nice package are not better just because they look good from the outside because the core idea is still the same: not supporting women but capitalism.
I believe, showing body hair in advertisements is at least portraying reality, however, in the overall picture, it doesn’t change the fact that these companies aim is the same as the ones who don’t show body hair. It is not about seeing body hair or not, it is about promoting the action of shaving and sending the message that hairlessness is the norm. As I mentioned previously, capitalism and patriarchy are strongly intertwined. Capitalism fuels patriarchy and patriarchy fuels capitalism. The capitalist system we grow up in teaches us that women have to shave. In the article “Why feminism and capitalism can’t coexist” (Aschoff, 2019) the author describes, feminism is not only about gender equality. Feminism is fighting for everyone’s rights regardless of their gender, ethnicity, education, religion etc. “We have the tools to vastly improve the lives of the world’s women, and all people for that matter. Yet we haven’t directed our resources, knowledge, and energy toward achieving this goal. Why? Because the goal of capitalism is not to better the world — it’s to make a profit” (ibid). Body hair grows naturally on our body but we remove it, we look at it as something unpleasant, we perceive it as something ugly. Small steps could be taken towards change by individual activism such as growing out body hair but the problem is much more complex than this. As previously mentioned, the people on the margins of our society such as women of color, trans women or fat women don’t have the privilege to do so. Society still didn’t accept them as they are and growing out their body hair might be the fuel on the fire. Being white, thin and cisgender I fall into the category of being privileged. Even with the privilege I have in society I don’t feel strong enough to temporarily stop shaving to rise against the system. Keeping autonomy is not only challenging but nearly impossible. As Aschoff is writing “[...] capitalism is a real-life way of organizing the norms, priorities, structures, and activities of society that evolves over time and space” (ibid). Real change doesn’t come until the system changes. We can of course reach small scale changes by individual activism but targeting the system is the real deal.
In the book of *Feminism for the 99%* (Arruzza, Cinzia, Tithi Bhattacharya, and Nancy Fraser, 2019) the authors state as well, the current life we live is in crisis and its root cause is capitalism. It is a crisis of economy, ecology, politics and care. They list many different points on how capitalism and feminism cannot coexist. Gender oppression, regulating sexuality, racism or destruction of earth is a direct result of the capitalist system. Capitalist societies are class societies where the minority exploits the larger group who works for wages. The authors add that it is less widely known that capitalist societies are the wellsprings of gender oppression. Subordination of women existed in many other previous class societies. But capitalism created a new modern form of oppression. “Its key move was to separate the making of people from the making of profit, to assign the first job to women, and to subordinate it to the second” (ibid). With this approach, capitalism reinvented the oppression of women. In a system whose structure is built upon ideas like this, women are not liberated whether it comes to their work life or their bodies. The book also points out that gender violence committed by men is the cause of the basic institutional structure of capitalist society. The structure of the system is designed to be discriminative and patriarchal.

1.5 Why do I shave?

As a student of a sustainable design program, capitalism and patriarchy came across my path many times in the three years of studying for my Bachelor’s degree. I realized I am very passionate about social issues such as reproductive rights, body acceptance or gender issues.
Throughout the years I gained more and more knowledge about the system and how it affects us. Towards the end of my studies, I started to be interested in and question my own relation to it. I began to look and analyze my habits and actions and I found myself in a situation where I couldn’t answer the question of “Why do I shave?”. I was eager to find out the answer to this question but the truth is there is no answer that can be formulated in a few words, sentences, paragraphs or even in projects. This topic has many complexities as I already listed a few before that cannot be defined or described in one simple way.

In this paragraph, I would like to tell you why I shave. I shave because this is what I’ve been told and taught. Since I can remember I know that women shave so therefore I shave too. I shave because this is the norm. I shave because then I have more self-confidence. I shave because of hygiene. I shave because being hairy is masculine. I shave because of men. I shave because of myself (?). I could probably list many more things in greater detail but I personally think the above-mentioned things are the main reasons that influence my shaving habits. Looking back at the listed points, there are many reasons I wasn’t aware of before. I am very much questioning if I ever shaved for myself. Throughout the interviews I had with my peers I asked the question “Why do you shave?”. The majority answered: I shave for myself. And then a few questions later I asked them: What influences you the most when it comes to shaving? The majority answered: men and social norms. Then how is it that we shave for ourselves? We do believe we do it for ourselves but if we grew up in a different reality where being unshaved is the norm, no one would say “I shave for myself” because we wouldn’t even know what shaving is. We are unconsciously influenced by the norms that surround us. Having the habit of shaving is a learned act society and the system taught us to do. This project made me realize that I haven’t seen my body with hair since I started shaving, for more or less 10 years now. How much of an influence it is that I take a decision from week to week to change my body in a way. This project and the experience of growing out my body hair — which I will talk about in greater detail in the next chapter — taught me to critically look at shaving. Even though I am very well aware of where the influence is coming from, I do think it is hard or nearly impossible to escape and under the power of the system.

1.6 +Change

With this project, I am aiming to raise awareness about the complexity of shaving. I would like to address the intertwined connections of shaving, social norms, capitalism and patriarchy. I am discussing the inequalities in society created by capitalism and how these affect our shaving habits. I am pointing out how gender, race, ethnicity, physical appearance or sexuality affect not only our life but also our shaving habits.
2.0 Methodology
2.1 Collaboration with society

The personal touch I have to this project was essential throughout the whole design process. I took myself as an example and questioned my shaving behaviors together with deconstructing the question of “Why do I shave?”. On the contrary, I was intrigued to find out and hear other women’s inputs and point of view when it comes to their shaving habits. I decided to conduct interviews with women from my age (mid 20s) in order to stay authentic to myself and to the project. I came to the decision that targeting and collaborating with my age group is more easily relatable and can support the project.

Altogether I interviewed 12 people from their 20s. Katrin Schwere, a local farmer and activist, was an exception when it comes to age since she is 58 years old. As she is an acquaintance of a friend of mine I heard she has plenty of stories and experience to share about body hair. I was intrigued to hear a person’s story who has much more life experience than us in the mid 20s. Schwere did not shave for decades and was studying marketing therefore she has an insight to how advertisements influence people. She pointed out that there is something called psychological advertising and that is targeting our emotions. She pointed out her concerns about advertising as it works against the ethics and moral in a sense that people with low self-esteem are targeted for raising profit. “We are marionettes of the system” – she added. I cannot argue with her point. We are unconsciously influenced by capitalist interests which will always have the aim of making profit. Stepping into the queue and surrendering to the norms means we are led by the system.

Schwere was not the only one bringing the advertisements into discussion. Autumn Laskey-Downs and Franciska Forrai, who I interviewed, shared that society and advertisements influence her the most when it comes to her shaving habits. On one hand some of the interviewees felt influenced but on the other hand some of them claimed they shave for themselves. There is no right or wrong but I believe, as earlier discussed in the chapter “Why do I shave?”, if capitalism did not exist women would not have the need of shaving. I assume most of us don’t know about why we shave and what influences us unconsciously. This is the reason I do this project, to reveal and discuss these things so women will have a better and deeper understanding of their behavior.

2.2 My hairy diary

The driving force of this project is my previous experience with body hair and shaving. Since I was a teenager I found my body hair problematic in terms of visibility. Back then, I was too young to understand the complexity of this topic but now as I am being part of a sustainable
WHY DO I SHAVE?

design program I realized that shaving is not necessarily a personal choice but part of a bigger systematic problem. I was partly and I still am one of those women who is affected by social norms, capitalism and patriarchy. I believe change comes in time. Carrying out this project helped me to be more comfortable with my own body and to stand up for my own views as well as to understand what role I represent in society.

Reading, learning, exploring and experimenting with this topic helped me to develop in myself as well as to reflect on my actions and feelings when it comes to my body hair. I started an experiment on the 1st February 2021 according to which I stopped shaving on all parts of my body. I used this time for observing and embracing those parts of my body that were ignored and suppressed before. During this time I was writing a diary where I collected all my thoughts. “I have mixed feelings about this experiment because I was always that person that would remove even the tiniest hair from her body. I had problems with body hair growth when I was a teenager and this probably shaped my opinion and world view on shaving: everything has to be removed.” (My diary, 1st February, 2021)

I believe this experiment played a big role in self-development as well as understanding where my boundaries are. I succeeded in surprising myself by feeling very comfortable being hairy. Seeing that my boundaries were much further than I thought made me realize that I was acting and picking up behavior from society that was not necessarily my decision. “I shaved today. I was so surprised by my feelings and reaction because I felt uncomfortable removing my hair. I got used to ignoring society’s reaction to my hairy body in the past few months and I also felt good about having hair on my body. Even though I overall felt positive about the experiment I was very much looking forward to shaving my legs because I thought they didn’t make me happy when they were hairy. The silhouette of them didn’t look as good with hair. So I shaved them but I don’t feel better. After seeing them hairy for so long now they look distant and unfamiliar hairless.” (My diary, 15th April 2021)

Why do I have contradictory feelings? How can my decisions feel right? My personal feelings are crashing with society’s expectations. Deep inside I know I am still not ready to stop shaving completely and to show off my hairy legs. On the contrary, I also know my body hair is not bothering me so why shouldn’t I keep it? Change doesn’t happen from one day to another even though I know and have a deep understanding of the intertwined connections of social norms, capitalism and patriarchy.

“I think I’ll keep my armpit hair. It looks cool and it’s kinda’ liberating to have it. I also think it’s something that would make people think. Why does this girl have armpit hair? I think it would be a great start of my journey towards creating a change in society” (My diary, 1st March 2021). For me the way to move forward is to keep only my armpit hair. I have to admit that even though I am in a privileged position (white, cisgender, thin) I don’t have the courage to ignore the societal norms. Individual actions matter and can create change on a community level but as one of my interviewees, Laura Minutolo, said: “The structures need to change too. If you start with representation and visibility then more people will be encouraged to ‘fuck the system’ but without the change of the system we won’t get anywhere.” I believe as this experiment and project helped me to change, this way I can pass my knowledge on and create further change until we reach system change.
3.0 Design project
3.1 Visual research

The start of my visual process was to carry out visual research not only to get inspiration but to understand and analyze the already existing visual approaches to the topic of shaving. As earlier mentioned, I realized most of the work done was either photographs of women with body hair or illustrations of women with body hair.

Figure 5: Illustrations of women with body hair by Jamie Squire, Christine Emily Yahya, Luba Dalu (read from left to right)

Figure 6: Photographs of women with body hair (Miley Cyrus, Harnaam Kaur, #januhairy campaign from Instagram)
Early in the process I decided to take a different path as I did not want to recreate the already existing visuals. Not only repetition would not help but portraying women with body hair seems to encourage individual activism but as debated before not every woman has the privilege to do so. I believe the approaches different designers took are necessary to be seen however could be pushed and developed further. As my initial plan was to conduct a visual communication project using illustration and typography I was pushing my work towards that direction. After several tryouts, tutorials and reflection I realized illustrations do not communicate my message. As my message is very complex and I am aiming to address a great amount of information I had to realize illustration is not the best medium to use. I am able to include more information and add deeper discussions to my topic if I use typography. By doing so I created a norm breaking visual language.
WHY DO I SHAVE?

Figure 7: Visual tryouts throughout the process
3.2 Relation to visual communication

My final outcome is an A5 sized artist book where I use typography as the main technique and approach to the topic. As mentioned previously, I realized that it is nearly impossible to communicate this topic in-depth in the form of illustrations. This subject is so complex that it cannot be addressed only by illustrations and minor text. It became clear that I needed to have a bigger amount of text where I can write everything out. Together with the typography my body hair also got a major focus in the book as it appears on several pages.

The reason for not choosing a format that can be reproduced (for example a zine) is because of the representation of body hair. I believe illustrating women with body hair can create change but using real body hair adds transgression and deep meaning to this topic. We hardly ever see body hair on women therefore the presence of it is not accepted. Having body hair on a book is transgressive and thought-provoking and therefore it attracts attention and creates curiosity.

I believe typography communicates not only visually but also in terms of content, therefore, using this medium has the potential to create change.
3.3 Experiment documentation

Before removing my body hair for the artist book I documented my growing-out-body-hair experiment in the form of photographs. The photographs are aimed to document the process of not shaving and it was not planned to use them in my artist book in any way. However, to activate these photos I posted two of them on my Instagram profile (@baloggreta) in order to get them out into the real world. After sharing my hairy armpits with the public, 11 people instantly unfollowed me. This experience sadly supports that body hair is still viewed as outrageous.
3.4 Concept

3.4.1 Body hair

As in every process, I have come a long way till I settled down with the final visual outcome. The visual research I have done not only inspired me but also gave guidance in terms of what visual elements I would and would not like to use. I recognized illustrating women with body hair has been done many times and is not necessarily creating change. I felt the need to create a new visual approach to the topic. My experiment helped me in the visualization process since my body hair is used in the outcome. I presume using real body hair removed from different parts of my body such as legs, armpits and pubic area is giving the viewer a shock. By giving them this reaction I am hoping to raise some thoughts and further respond to the topic. One of my first ideas was to store my body hair in a jar and incorporate that into the artist book. Looking back at this idea and my outcome, I can say that by glueing body hair on paper I have the opportunity to interact directly with the reader and so to create a stronger message. There is direct access to my body hair as it is not locked in a glass jar. I believe the concern of being hairy as a woman causes that society is not used to seeing body hair. Therefore I believe using real body hair is norm-breaking.

I designed the text in a way that the body hair is interrupting it. My goal was to break the theoretical text with body hair to disturb the reader and so to give them time to reflect and think. The pieces of hair interfere in the text at every keyword: body hair, social norms, capitalism, patriarchy. I critique the social norms and the system therefore I placed my
I did not only use my body hair inside the book but I also used it on the cover as a typeface. The book is representing my body and the hairy title is critiquing and challenging the question “Why do I shave?”. I had the intention of creating a cover that is outstanding and grabbing people’s attention. The body hair creates a 3D effect on the cover reflecting its real existence on the body. The cover is hiding all the details behind this topic such as how the complexities of shaving are hidden in society.
3.4.2 Paper making

To push the concept further I decided to make my own paper out of beauty magazines. These magazines portray women with perfect skin and body and they as well are promoting beauty products. I recycled sheets from these magazines with the intention of recreating the norms. I cut the magazine sheets into small pieces and soaked them in water. I used a blender to make the pulp. After I got a smooth texture I poured the pulp into a bucket of water. The fibers were drained through a silk screen in order to separate them from water. I left the sheets to dry overnight. The handmade paper made the process very slow because the equipment I had only allowed me to make two sheets a day. Due to the limited number of sheets I also had to scale down my experiments when it comes to testing the paper.
3.4.3 Framing

I chose to work with a standard size. My artist book is A5 size and this format is representing the current social norms. Both the body hair and the handmade paper are breaking these norms. The recreation of norms is pointing towards change. I start the first page with an answer to the book’s title: I shave because... The continuation of the sentences is placed on the last page and so frames the book. Framing the book with a short sentence at the start and the end is critiquing shaving since there is no direct answer to my project’s main question: “Why do I shave?”. I zoom in and pick apart the details of the topic that are hidden behind this question.

Figure 14: First and last page of my artist book

3.4.4 Contrast

The simplicity of the typography and layout is in contrast with the complexity of the topic and the content of the text. This is not the only contrast that exists in the book. To present my diary I wrote throughout my experiment I used my handwriting and kept all the mistakes and scribbles in this very informal form of writing. On the contrary I used the serif typeface, Edita (I talk about the choice of the font in greater detail in the next chapter), for the formal theoretical text that is very much research based. I selected the best quotes from my collaboration and rotated them 90 degrees. On each spread a personal type of writing is put against the theoretical text, meaning: diary vs. theoretical text, quotes vs. theoretical text.
3.5 Design decisions

3.5.1 Binding

When I decided on making an artist book I started to experiment with different binding techniques. Since the binding affects the design I had to have a clear plan before I could move on. I tried out various binding techniques with different types of paper since I did not have an unlimited number of handmade sheets. It became clear very quickly that my handmade paper is really fragile and therefore some of the techniques did not work such as sewing the pages together by hand. The pages started to rip as I wanted to tighten the thread.
Not only the practicalities played a big role but also the concept and the visual outlook of the binding. To support all of these I decided on working with glue. I made four signatures (three consisting of three sheets, one consisting of four sheets) that were sewed together separately by a sewing machine. To bind the signatures together I glued them on the spine. When it comes to gluing, a big concern of mine was that the sheets will get wavy as it happened with some of my tryouts. Luckily, this wasn’t the case with the handmade sheets and I succeeded in gluing the signatures together. The last step in the gluing process was to put on the cover.
WHY DO I SHAVE?

By using this binding technique I create a statement. No-one can pick my book apart to remove or to add things to it. This is a collection of personal experiences and opinions together with a research heavy text that shows my current approach to the topic.

3.5.2 Printing

The printing process was the most stressful part of the project. Before I was able to print, I had to cut my sheets into A4 size as they were slightly bigger. The whole printing process required a lot of organization and attention. I printed every page one by one therefore not only the editing process became harder due to having to reorder the pages but I also had to find the right printer settings for the different thicknesses of the sheets. Throughout the process experimented with the thickness of the sheets by recycling different amounts of magazine sheets. I saw quickly that around eight magazine sheets is the right amount for creating two handmade sheets. I had to be quite precise with the thickness of the sheets since they couldn’t be too thin because of fragility or too thick because of the printer.

3.5.3 Typography and layout

The major technique used in my artist book is typography. It is a feminist artist book therefore the two typefaces I used are created by female designers. I used a serif font, Edita designed by Pilar Cano, for the body text because it is an easy-to-read font. Our eyes connect the serifs and therefore the reading becomes easier. The fact that my text is interrupted by my body hair I wanted to balance out the might occurring reading difficulties with an easy-to-read font. However, I used a sans-serif font, Palanquin, designed by Pria Ravichandran for the chapter names.
and page numbers to separate them from the body text. My intention was to leave space for the handmade paper and the body hair therefore I chose to use big margins and a minimalistic design. I used left-aligned text for better readability furthermore this alignment also better allowed me to edit the text with the interrupting body hair.

Figure 19: On the left it is showing the different typefaces I used in the book, on the right it is showing the margin size

3.6 Contextualization

After finishing my artist book I realized that I want to document it in a setting where female bodies are present. Having the question “Why do I shave?” on the cover written with body hair creates contrast with the shaved female bodies. By showing skin on the pictures I show the vulnerable side of women and the oppression that the system creates. I placed the book on different body parts showing how much capitalism influences every bit of the female body. Capitalism and patriarchy became part of female bodies and the decisions women take regarding their bodies are highly influenced by the system. My intention was to show inclusivity in these photos, however gathering people who have different body shapes or skin color was more difficult than I thought. The vulnerability of the photoshoot made people reject participation. This experience states my research as it shows that privilege exists and how it controls people within society.
3.7 Exhibition

Due to the covid-19 pandemic, all graduating design students from Linnaeus University had to present their graduation project in the form of an online exhibition. Even though this format is the official graduation exhibition, two classmates of mine and I decided to exhibit our work at the university’s physical exhibition venue, the +Change Project Space in Kalmar. This space currently can only be used for window displays as the regulations do not allow visitors to enter the venue. In the physical exhibition, I exhibited my remaining body hair together with my
WHY DO I SHAVE?

artist book. The hair is scattered around the round transparent container showing transgression and the fact that women have body hair too. I hung some contextualization photos and quotes from my collaboration next to my book in order to communicate its content. In the online exhibition, I intended to show the contextualization of my project in the form of photographs. Since my book is very physical and materialistic it was challenging to present it in an online space. Therefore the contextualization photos were the best possible way to showcase my project. Following my book’s design, I used a simple layout on the website. The online exhibition can be viewed on Linnaeus University’s webpage by clicking on this link.

Figure 21: Window display in the +Change Project Space in Kalmar
4.0 Conclusion
4.0 Conclusion

With this project, I started a long journey of understanding the entwined connections of capitalism, patriarchy, social norms and shaving. This report is only the starting point of the discovery of these connections. Examining the relationship with my body hair helped me to understand the role I have in society. I realized how much privilege certain people have in society due to their physical appearance, sexual orientation, race or gender etc. Real change will happen when people from the margins of our society will be able to grow out their body hair without being discriminated.

However, change is not a static thing, it is an ongoing process that never stops. It is already happening. A step was already taken since we see women with body hair in advertisements however the root of the advertisements are profit. If we weren’t told and reminded of the constant need of products in order to fix our “flaws” this world could be a more human oriented place. Therefore, the hairlessness norm won’t change until the system changes. I believe individual activism such as growing out body hair or stopping buying certain products brings small scale change and is very much appreciated and needed from people who currently have the autonomy to do so. However, change will happen gradually and I am having the hope that one day we will reach equality. If people on the margins of our society can have the autonomy to act as the privileged ones it means there is no such thing as privilege anymore, and liberation and equality already happened.

My aim by conducting this project is to start discussions in order to take steps forward on the path of change. As a visual communicator and designer, I have the possibility to bring about attention, awareness or curiousity when it comes to shaving. I look at this project as an open platform where I can discuss and share my knowledge on the topic of shaving. Conducting this project was a life experience since I did not only gain theoretical knowledge but I built a deeper connection with my body through the experiment I had. I have the hope to spread this knowledge in order to create change for future generations. With this project, I was not only challenging myself but the social norms that surround body hair, as well as how patriarchy and capitalism influence women’s lives when it comes to defining their femininity.
5.0 Bibliography
5.0 Bibliography


Butler, J. (2011) *Your behavior creates your gender*. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bo7o2LYATDc (Accessed: 02-03-2021)


6.0 Addendum
6.0 Addendum

All spreads of my artist book
WHY DO I SHAVE?

Preface

Let me start in the beginning. The driving force of my publication is the desire to reshape and understand myself. I was born with a physical trait that was not aligned with societal norms. As a child, I often felt self-conscious and inadequate. This feeling manifested in my daily routine, leading me to question my identity.

As I grew older, I realized that my very existence was challenged by the expectations of others. I began to explore the reasons behind this dissatisfaction and sought to redefine my values. This journey led me to question the assumptions I had made about myself and the world around me.

In this publication, I aim to share my experiences and insights, hoping to inspire others who may be going through similar struggles. My hope is that by understanding my journey, others can find the courage to embrace their uniqueness and redefine their own narratives.

In the end, I believe that everyone has a right to be who they choose to be. My goal is to contribute to a society where individuality is celebrated, and everyone is free to express themselves without fear of judgment.
WHY DO I SHAVE?

I’ve been thinking a lot about shaving recently. I started thinking about it because I noticed that I don’t shave as much as I used to. I used to shave every day, but now I only shave about once a week. I’ve been thinking about why I do this, and I think it’s because I feel more comfortable without the hair on my legs. It’s not that I don’t like the hair, but I think it’s just that I feel more comfortable without it. I’ve also been thinking about the process of shaving itself. It’s not very pleasant, and it’s not very efficient. I’ve been thinking about whether I should try to find a better way to do it, but I haven’t really come up with anything. I’ve been thinking about whether I should just stop shaving altogether, but I don’t think that’s a good idea. I think I’ll just keep doing it as I’ve been doing it, but I’ll try to make it as pleasant as possible.
WHY DO I SHAVE?

“When I hear the word body hair the first things that come into my mind is razors, maintenance and expectations.”
— Clara Djonovic, 26

Social norms

...
WHY DO I SHAVE?

There are certain things that we associate with femininity.

Hairlessness is one of them.

— Sara Bertótié, 22

Sara Bertótié

Sara Bertótié
"My body my norms"

I have been reading a lot lately about why I shave and the norms around it. It’s a personal choice, but one that I’ve found myself questioning more and more. Why do I shave? Do I need to? Is it for societal pressure, or is it for personal preference? 

"I feel better to be among people when I am shaved.

— Virag Bogdánska Nagy, 20"

For men body hair means masculinity, for women it means embarrassment.

— Franciscia Forrai, 24

There’s something in the idea of having body hair that connects me to a certain sense of freedom. It’s not something that I necessarily want to hide, but it’s a part of who I am. I feel more comfortable with it, and I don’t think I’m alone in that. I’ve seen so many people embrace their body hair, and it’s inspiring to see how they’ve gained confidence and self-acceptance from it.

"I don’t think I’m alone in that. I’ve seen so many people embrace their body hair, and it’s inspiring to see how they’ve gained confidence and self-acceptance from it."

— Anonymous

What’s the difference between body hair and unwanted hair? I think it’s important to acknowledge the difference and not judge people based on their body hair. It’s a personal choice, and everyone has the right to decide what they want to do with their body.

"What’s the difference between body hair and unwanted hair? I think it’s important to acknowledge the difference and not judge people based on their body hair. It’s a personal choice, and everyone has the right to decide what they want to do with their body."

— Anonymous

Why do I shave? It’s a personal choice, but I think it’s important to consider the reasons behind it. Is it for societal pressure, or is it for personal preference? I think it’s important to find a balance and not let societal norms dictate what we do with our bodies.

"Why do I shave? It’s a personal choice, but I think it’s important to consider the reasons behind it. Is it for societal pressure, or is it for personal preference? I think it’s important to find a balance and not let societal norms dictate what we do with our bodies."

— Anonymous
WHY DO I SHAVE?

It’s not just about removing hair. Shaving can be a form of self-care. It’s a way to connect with your body, to make it look the way you want it to. It can also be a way to mark the passage of time, to see how much you’ve grown or changed. Shaving can be a ritual, a routine, a way to start or end your day. It can be a way to express yourself, to make a statement. Shaving can also be a way to connect with others, to bond with friends or family. It can be a way to share a moment, to create a memory. Shaving is not just about hair, it’s about life.
WHY DO I SHAVE?

―Lauren Elkind, 25

"Being told to feel lucky about having a hair structure that is not so visible feels so strange to me."

―Lauren Elkind, 25
WHY DO I SHAVE?

I grew up in Africa and have a large body of hair. When I moved to Europe, I noticed that people there shave a lot less. This made me question my own habits and think about why I choose to shave. I believe it’s a personal preference, but I also feel like society pressure me to do so.

The system

I think it’s important to understand the cultural and societal factors that influence our shaving habits. In some cultures, shaving is seen as a sign of cleanliness and hygiene, while in others, it’s simply a personal choice. It’s also worth noting that the availability of shaving products and the ease of access to them can impact shaving habits.

However, I don’t think shaving is a matter of just personal preference. I believe it’s also a form of self-expression and identity. For many people, shaving is a way to express their individuality and differentiate themselves from the crowd.

In conclusion, while I understand why some people choose to shave, I also respect those who choose not to. It’s all about finding a balance between what society expects and what makes you feel comfortable.
WHY DO I SHAVE?

"Razors are more expensive when they're pink and are in the women's section."
— Laura Minutolo, 23

“Mansplaining isn't an actual diagnosis, but I...
WHY DO I SHAVE?

Why do I shave?

The act of shaving is a daily routine for many people. It is a way to maintain personal hygiene and appearance. Shaving can be done for various reasons, such as removing facial hair, grooming, or preparing for a special occasion.

Shaving can be done using a razor, a depilatory cream, or an electric razor. The choice of method depends on personal preference and the type of hair to be removed.

Shaving can be a time-consuming process, especially if you have a lot of hair to remove. It can also be challenging, especially if you have sensitive skin.

Some people shave their faces daily, while others shave once a week or less. The frequency of shaving depends on personal preference and the type of hair to be removed.

Shaving can be a relaxing activity, especially if you enjoy the feeling of smooth skin. It can also be a time to focus on yourself and take care of your body.

Shaving can also be a social activity, as it is a way to connect with others and share a common experience.

In conclusion, shaving is a personal choice that has been practiced for centuries. It can be a time-consuming process, but it can also be a relaxing and social activity.
WHY DO I SHAVE?

In April [2023], I started shaving. I had no reason, nor did I want to. I didn't do it for any reason. I just did it because it made me feel happy. I felt good about having my legs smooth and shaved. It made me feel more confident and self-assured. I was proud of my body and how I took care of it. I felt like I was in control of my body and my life.

I never thought about shaving before. I never considered it a necessary part of my routine. But now, I feel different. I feel empowered. I feel in control. I feel happy.

End thoughts

Sharing is just sooooo much into our brain so we just need to do it.

— Marguerita Politi, 35
WHY DO I SHAVE?

“Why do I shave?”

– Martina Lipala, 24

“I would be happy if I didn’t have to shave.”

– Martina Lipala, 24

“WHY DO I SHAVE?”

— Martina Lipala, 24

“I would be happy if I didn’t have to shave.”

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WHY DO I SHAVE?

As a horror, personal, and collaborative artist, I’ve been exploring the realms of visual art and alternative culture, inspired by the power of imagination and the endless possibilities of creation. In my work, I seek to challenge conventional narratives and push boundaries, inviting the audience to question their own perceptions and engage with the complexity of human experience. Through various mediums and techniques, I aim to evoke emotions, provoke thought, and encourage a deeper understanding of the world we live in.