

I AM NOT MY HAIR – OR AM I?
THE PERSONAL CHOICE OF WOMEN WITH SHORT HAIR:
AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

by

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(Under the Direction of Patricia Hunt-Hurst)

ABSTRACT

For hundreds of years American women have consistently been expected to uphold traditional hair beauty ideals. Normative expectations tell women to wear their tresses long to maintain youthfulness and sexiness, yet thousands of young women choose to wear their hair as the antithesis. This qualitative study examined the inspirations, motivations and influences guiding millennial-aged women to make the personal decision to shave, buzz or cut their hair very short and to discover how their short hair relates to their identity and self perception. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with eighteen women. Thirteen major themes were derived from four main objectives: 1) To discover what motivates women to cut their hair extremely short, 2) To discover how women view themselves with short hair, 3) To reveal how women with short hair perceive others views of their short hair and 4) To discover how short hair relates to identity and self-confidence.

INDEX WORDS: Hair, Short Hair, Women, Identity, Beauty, Appearance, Millennials, Self-perception

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DEDICATION

“Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: if either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.”

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

I dedicate this thesis to the love of my life, Adam Andrew Leone. The man who has stood beside me for the entirety of this degree, who cheered me on to keep going when I wanted to give up; who prayed with me, edited rough drafts for me and loved me through it all - including but not limited to tears, hangry-ness and stress. This thesis would not have been possible without you, Adam!

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

It is without question that stories about hair permeate our daily lives. Television, news and magazines typically inform us when a celebrity opts for a new look or a selfless, brave soul decides to cut their hair for charity. According to professor and humanitarian, Neal A. Lester, “hair is a lens through which to read race, class, gender, and sexuality in provocative and revealing ways” (2013, para. 1). Our hair is important both to us and others’ perception of us; it is a way of connecting us with each other and with our world. Hair speaks volumes and symbolizes that which intrigues us. Hair is unquestionably significant, especially so for women, (Hathaway citing Weitz, 2004) who are constantly bombarded with the American cultural standard of beauty that praises long, straight hair as the gold standard for physical attractiveness (Rosette & Dumas, 2007).

Long hair has historically proven to be the most popular hairstyle worn by women. The women who wear short styles have prompted controversy and speculation for their rejection of these societal norms. Given the facts that women with conventional attractiveness fare better professionally, make more money and receive more job offers and and that short hair on women is strongly associated with signs of age, illness, and punishment, what motivates women to cut their hair short; especially since long hair is one of the biggest identifiers of attractiveness and femininity promotions (Hamermesh & Biddle, 1994; Koppelman, 1996)?

In November of 2015, I cut my hair, buzzed it in fact. After eight long years of contemplating the idea, but also terrified to make such a drastic change, I finally took the plunge.

Although I finally got the guts and “braved the shave,” so to speak, my hair has been long throughout most of my life.

Hair increasingly grew to be my identity once I hit puberty and especially in high school. I had long, curly, blonde hair. It was how people found me in a crowd (Fig.1); it was an identifier. Keeping my hair long was important to fit into the classic beauty ideal, an ideal that girls learn from a very young age. I retained long hair, even though it was inconsistent with who I felt I was: an artistic, edgy and confident young woman. On the outside, I looked the same as most other girls but, on the inside, I begged to be different. Growing up my mantra was, “Be yourself: an original is always worth more than a copy.” Although I tried to live that way, it is hard to be yourself when the outside fails to reflect what is within.

In my first year of college, I cut my hair into a longer pixie style. I absolutely loved the change it made me feel more grown up and confident and it fit my style, but after being mistaken for my Dad’s wife on more than one occasion and not getting very many dates during this period, I grew my hair out once again. Most people were happy in my decision; I looked more feminine, more like my peers. In 2014, my hair was finally long enough to pull into a ponytail and I continued to maintain it at shoulder length or a little bit longer. When I started dating my husband, I revealed to him my desire to buzz my hair short. He told me that there would never be a convenient time to buzz my head and that I should do it. When I told other people, including family, the pushback was surprising! Many told me that I should not cut my hair because others would assume that I was gay or that I was sick. As much as I would like to say their words did not affect me, I cannot. Rather than diving straight into a buzzed head, I continued to contemplate the idea. Finally committing to change, I modified my hair in stages, first keeping my hair in an edgy undercut, the bottom half of my head buzzed down to stubble, but the hair on

top was long enough to cover up the change. This new haircut was only revealed when it was pulled up into a topknot. It was not until a few weeks later that I finally chose to buzz off the rest of my hair (Fig.2). I realized that I was not cutting my hair for anybody else; I was cutting it for me. Although my identity involves many unique facets, my hair is one of the factors that remains an important aspect to my identity. Humanitarian Neal A. Lester makes the claim in one of his articles, “our hair stories connect us to others, speak volumes about us, and help us interpret and make sense of our worlds beyond follicles” (2013, para. 14). If this is true will other short haired women’s stories match my own? I pursued and formulated answers through the analysis of this thesis research. It is important to me to express myself through my hair. Living my own story and also having an interest in hair has inspired me to pursue an auto-ethnographic approach to this thesis.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to uncover the inspirations, motivations and influences guiding American, millennial women, of all ethnicities, aged 18-35 to choose to shave, buzz, or cut their hair very short and to discover how their short hair relates to identity and self.

OBJECTIVES

- 1) To discover what motivates women to cut their hair extremely short.
- 2) To discover how women view themselves with short hair.
- 3) To reveal how women with short hair perceive how others' view their short hair.
- 4) To discover how short hair relates to identity and self-confidence.

ASSUMPTIONS AND LIMITATIONS

It is assumed that all interviewees answer questions honestly and to the best of their ability. It is also assumed that my research questions are unbiased after undergoing qualitative study and perception-analysis.

As is the case with any study, limitations exist that affect the study and therefore, its transferability within the general population. The use of personal interviews leads to little control over the parties reached; interviewees are limited to whom the researcher knows in their own social circle or whom they can network with through social media within the research time period. It is also likely that a small size of participants does not represent the entirety of short

haired American women. Lastly, there exists potential for sampling bias. With a personal interviewing method of data collection, subjects are first known or discovered by the researcher, which can lead to the access of similar individuals with similar mindsets, traits and characteristics. To offset this limitation, I interviewed as many different ethnicities and ages (within my age frame) as I could to create a balance within the group.

JUSTIFICATION

Hair is a crucial factor of self-representation because it is a display of the outer self (Baumeister, 1986; Biddle-Perry & Cheang, 2008). As previously stated, hair has been studied for its symbolism, politics, and power, among other things (Zdanty, 1999) but research on short hair due to a woman's personal choice is almost non-existent. Past research in regards to hair (not just head hair) has varied greatly. In terms of hair removal there are many scholarly papers regarding the modification/removal of pubic hair (Biddle-Perry, 2008; Sargeant, 2008; Sherrow, 2006). There have also been articles relating to hair and identity with Black women (Rosette & Dumas, 2007; Thompson, 2009). Some of the only studies in regards to short hair have focused on women with hair loss, whether due to chemotherapy, alopecia or other illness (Dua, 2013; Trusson & Pilnick, 2016), but other bald, nearly bald or short-haired women are under represented in research because they are the minority of women (Koppelman, 1996).

Women were studied in this research because they spend more time, money and effort on their appearance than men, especially on their hair (Hiltebeitel & Miller, 1998; Manning, 2011). They have also historically worn longer hair than men, which means that it is not abnormal for men to wear short hair, but it is more unique for women to have short hair (Stevenson, 1999).

Millennial women were studied specifically because hair norms shift, as women get older, shorter hair becomes more acceptable within society.

According to fashion scholars Kim K.P. Johnson and Sharon Lennon, the social psychology of dress is concerned with, “how an individual’s dress affects the behavior of self as well as the behavior of others” (2015, para 2). This research on women and their short hair will aid in a greater understanding and knowledge of dress and social psychology. Working out the motivations behind these hairstyles and discovering the self-perception for some women with extremely short hair allows us to learn more about this under-researched hair group, while also aiding the reader to better understand the culture in which we live.

Rarely are the women who wear more “masculine” haircuts by choice studied for their hairstyles, yet thousands of women shave, buzz, or cut their hair short every day, their actions in dissonance with the millions of women who retain traditionally longer hair. This study is important because we live in a society where a woman’s body is extremely political. Women are critiqued for their appearance whether it is for the size of their bodies, for wearing leggings or tops that are too revealing or for wearing their hair short like the women who participate in this study. This research is so much deeper than “women with short hair;” this is also a story about women’s lives, and as much about women’s empowerment as it is about how these women feel about their hair.

DEFINITIONS

Buzz cut – “an extremely short haircut, usually executed with electric clippers that do not have a guard comb in place.” It is most distinguished by the guard number used on the electric clippers. It can range from super short (no guard = 00000 = 1/16 inches) to longer (guard = 4 = 1 1/2 inches) (Buzzcut guide, 2014; Firchau, 2015; Sherrow, 2006).

Millennial – The millennial generation consists of “those born after 1980 and the first generation to come of age in the new millennium (Pew Research Center, 2016).

Outer self - the self that is seen and known by other people (Baumeister, 1986).

Pixie cut – this term refers to a variety of short, layered haircuts. It is also referred to as an 'elfin' cut. The pixie style is cut over the ears and may include wispy bangs. It also may or may not have longer hair on the top of the head. The defining feature of a pixie cut is close-cropped layers, that frame the face, and lie close on the sides and back of the head (Hair Finder, 2016).

Shaved head – a haircut where every trace of hair is completely removed from the head.

Social psychology – study of individuals within a social setting (Johnson, Yoo, Kim & Lennon 2008).

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction to Hair

For centuries long hair has been one of the strongest representations of European-American femininity and sexuality (Berg, 1951; Ellery, 2014; Zdanty, 1999) and is studied for many reasons including, its symbolism, politics, and power. Typically, both men and women have deep, personal relationships with their hair (Weitz, 2004) and, due to its visibility, it represents a strong part of a person's identity (Whitbourne, 2015). Rose Weitz, sociologist and author of *Rapunzel's Daughters: What Women's Hair Tells us about Women's Lives* (2004), indicates that hair is important for three reasons: 1) It is personal - hair grows directly out of the body, 2) It is malleable - hair can be changed to however the wearer sees fit, and 3) It is public – unabashedly on display.

Historically, hair has had more value for women than it has for men (Hathaway citing Weitz, 2004). We see this illustrated in countless stories, myths, and legends that have captivated audiences for generations, from serpent-haired *Medusa* to golden-haired *Rapunzel*. From the long locks of Della in *The Gift of the Magi* to the beautiful, long-haired sirens in *Homer's Odyssey*. Women's hair is so important, in fact, that it is “combed, cut, coloured, curled, straightened, plaited, swept up, tied back, decorated, plucked and shaved” to fit the necessary cultural standard of beauty (Biddle-Perry & Cheang, 2008, p. 3).

Hair is also “a vital means by which our bodies are given meaning and identity” (Biddle-Perry & Cheang, 2008, p. 3). Unlike other body parts, the significance of hair is manifested in

social, cultural and religious settings (Hair Foundation, 2009). The study of hair augments theories of consumer behavior and habits, technology, change in fashion and femininity, cleanliness and even social order (Zdanty, 1999). That being said, while hair is a popular topic among scholars, very few have recognized the women who make the personal choice to rid themselves of their long hair, and rarely, if ever, do researchers seek to document the motivations and perceptions supporting such a drastic change that opposes traditional beauty practices for young, millennial women.

The following sections provide a thorough and concise review of some of the important aspects of hair both generally and in relation to this study. Section “*Hair properties*” illustrates the physiological side of hair: its makeup, physical characteristics and the information it gives. “*Hair history*” gives a brief overview of young American women’s hairstyles from the colonial times to the present, illustrating cultural beauty norms within our country. “*Hair & Identity*” discusses how hair and identity interrelate across cultures and with femininity. “*Gender, Sexuality & Appearance*” follows how hair is gendered, sexual, and critical to how we present ourselves to others. Lastly, “*Women & Short Hair*” talks about the stigmas associated with short head hair and an overview of the accepted forms of short hair.

Hair Properties

Almost all humans have hair covering their entire body except for the palms of their hands, soles of their feet, their eyelids and their lips (Mendoza, 2002). Arguably, the appearance of head hair is what makes it most significant but its properties are exceptionally helpful in determining much about humans of all races and creeds. A biblical theme taken from Matthew 10:30, is that God knows the number of hairs on your head - impressive considering humans are born with approximately 100,000+ hairs on our heads (Bauman Medical, 2014). These 100,000+

strands come in many shapes and sizes, their physical characteristics determined by race, genes and age. Even though the hair on top of our heads is biologically dead matter, its physical properties determine things like thickness, color, degree of waviness, etc. Since only heat and chemicals can alter the hair type and color we were born with, these physical properties can even determine how we wear our hair.

Hair is a biological polymer mostly composed of a protein called keratin that gives hair its strength and stiffness (Mendoza, 2002; Sherrow, 2006; Lowe, 2016). Hair structure is divided into two parts, the hair follicle and the hair shaft. When looking at a hair shaft under a microscope, one can see that its cross section is made up of three continuous zones. Author and humanitarian Art Neufeld describes the zones in his book *Hair* (2012). The first is the cuticle, or outer layer that is made up of tiny cells that are layered like roof shingles, which is responsible for a hair's shininess. Next comes the cortex, the second layer packed with keratins and pigments that give the hair its strength, color and thickness. Lastly, the medulla is the disorganized and open area in the center of the shaft. It contains the protein trichohyalin and variants in this gene produce wavy or curly hair. The hair that grows out from the scalp (the shaft) is referred to as dead matter. Only the small bit of hair inside the scalp is considered to be alive - this is the hair follicle and grows at a rate of $\frac{1}{2}$ an inch per month (Neufeld, 2012).

Hair can come in a wide range of make-ups but, according to pharmaceutical scholars at the University of Sao Paulo, the main physical characteristics of hair include: "elasticity, smoothness, volume, shine and softness" (Velasco, Sa Dias, de Freitas, Vieira, Pinto, Kaneko & Baby, 2009). Hair also has the capability to be oily or dry, a characteristic dependent on particular genetic makeup. Threads of hair have different structures within ethnic groups but can also change within these very same groups (Neufeld, 2012). For example, people with Mexican

heritage are typically known for having very dark hair but in some circumstances babies are born with red hair. While rare, (only 1-4% of the world's population has red hair) the gene for red hair is plausible across many races (Neufeld, 2012). Hair also has the ability to enhance the skin's wall-like properties – it provides a buffer from trauma, temperature extremes and can also provide a sense of heightened awareness to the environment. For example, when you are in a scary situation your hair may stand on end (Stenn, 2016).

Because of its natural properties, hair is an excellent source for discovering information about people. A single human hair can help to determine someone's age, health, race and even their diet (Mendoza, 2002). Due to its many traits, hair is a durable substance and takes a very long time to biodegrade. Healthy head hair is able to withstand temperatures up to 450 degrees without damage, including burning or melting (*Black Hair Science*, 2012). If properly sealed in glass, hair can last for thousands of years because it doesn't readily decompose like other parts of the body. Leila's Hair Museum in Independence, Missouri houses many examples of this early trend of hair in glass, which was a popular way to memorialize the dead before picture-taking cameras were invented. The museum has one lock of hair enclosed in a crystal brooch that is from the year 1680 (Cphoon, 2016).

Hair History of Young American Women

Scientists, through both excavation and exploration have found many different artifacts spanning thousands of years, that prove that, "people around the world cared about the length, texture, color, growth, style and loss of their hair" (Sherrow, 2006, p. xxi). Beauty is subjective and very dependent on personal preference and culture, but hairstyles carry their own universality, they are recognizable even though they are coded differently across cultures (Philippon, 2013). The styling of hair has a vast history that is rooted in culture, symbolism and

politics and young, American women are no different; they too, have had a long history with their hair.

1600s-1700s. According to historians Edward Warwick, Henry Pitz and Alexander Wyckoff (1965), Colonial American women received much of their styling advice from England and France in the 1600s and 1700s. In the early 1600s women parted their hair behind their ears and pulled hair back into chignons away from the face (Tortora & Marcketti, 2015). Wired out curls were common staples depicted in portraits among the mid-to-late 1600s. As hair was styled higher, wire frames supported the hair. Generally women wore this look with two long, large curls hung from the back of the head over the shoulders. This style is commonly depicted in art of this time period.

Around the early 1700s, hair was arranged away from the face and closer to the head. Hair powdering was rarely used at first, but after 1750 it became a very popular practice, commonly used for special occasions. Both men and women were seen sporting powdered hair in formal portraits. Around the 1760s hair was arranged symmetrically and dressed in high pompadours. From then on hair gradually grew higher and higher, yet French coiffures had exaggerated heights could “add 24 to 36 inches to the height of the wearer” (Corson, 2001, p. 327). Still, hairstyles were extremely intricate and continued to use wire supports along with false hair, hay, yarn or other padding materials. Hair would then be coated with pomade or powder to keep the hair in place; these were made from the fat of pigs, calves or bears (Barrell, 2006). During the reign of Marie Antoinette women began to adorn their hair with anything and everything from flowers to feathers to jewels and ribbons (Tortora & Marcketti, 2015). When women went out, their hair was usually covered with different hats, lace caps or bonnets; these

were made extremely large to accommodate women's tall and elaborate hairstyles. These large hairstyles eventually faded for the rise of the very fleeting fad of short hair.

One of the first examples of short hair seen in American history started with the Titus cut, this short, layered haircut mimicked Ancient Roman statues (Philippon, 2013). Another example that followed this trend came from France. The French Revolution (1789-99) greatly influenced both American fashion and hairstyling. One popular cut was used to emulate the men and women who had their hair cut short before being beheaded by the guillotine. This short, ragged look was called *à la victim*, worn to celebrate the fall of the old government (Scarborough, 2016; Corson, 2001). Like most fads, this style didn't last long and women eventually used wigs to cover up their hair and keep up with current trends. In the 1790s women stopped powdering their hair with intense frequency, in their place they wore more natural looks like those seen on classical Greek statues (Scarborough, 2016; Tortora & Marcketti, 2015).

1800s. Prior to the 1800s, women in America regarded their own hair care and beauty culture as private matters (Sherrow, 2006). Servants, close family or private hairdressers (if the woman was rich enough) were the only people who tended to women's hair (Biddle-Perry & Cheang, 2008; Rudd & Gogh, 1999). At this time, hairdressing consisted of washing, combing and arranging hair rather than cutting it (Willett, 2000). These activities usually occurred at a woman's home because stylists didn't have personal shops in which to tend hair. A woman's hair was worn very long and arranged in updos, only to be let down in intimate settings between man and wife. Wearing loose hair was seen as both virginal and promiscuous (Cooper, 1971; Gibson, 2014). During the early 1800s hair was usually adorned with ribbons or headbands, known as "Jane Austen hairstyles", the most popular hair looks were parted in the center, with curls near the front of the face while the rest was pulled into a bun arrangement at the back (*The History of*

the World of Hair, n.d., para. 3). The Victorian Age (1837-1901) brought forth more intricate hairstyles, including braids, twists and adornments like flowers, combs and pearls. In 1872, Marcel Grateau patented his heated curling iron, which created “Marcel Waves,” that were popular into the 1920s (Neufeld, 2012; Zdanty, 1999). The 1880s introduced the pompadour hairstyle where hair was arranged upwards with either a small “pouf” in the front with curls at the sides or with curls over the forehead (*History of the World of Hair*, n.d., para. 7; Tortora & Marcketti, 2015). The end of the 1800s saw the rise of the very popular “Gibson Girl” style, which lasted for many years and carried on into the early 1900s.

1900s. In the very early 1900s women wore their long hair styled in complex layers, piled high on top of the head. Long hair remained the norm for almost all Western women. Hair was puffed out around large forward-sweeping hats while padding was used to build up the hair at the front of the head. The back of the hair was then pinned up and supported by hair combs (Ewing, 1974). This was “a clear display of class and status” (Gibson, 2014, p. 10). The ideal American woman of this time period dressed and wore her hair like the “Gibson Girl,” named after the female character designed by illustrator Charles Dana Gibson. She was “portrayed in magazines, memorialized on plates and played on screen” by actresses such as Mary Pickford and Lillian Gish (Weitz, 2004, p. 14). Her most prominent and recognized features included a tiny waist and long, beautiful curls piled on top of her head. In the case of the Gibson girl, “long hair symbolized both sexuality and fertility” (Cooper, 1971, p. 66). This remained to be a popular ideal throughout the majority of the 1910s, although the hair was worn lower at the base of the neck. Similar padded hairstyles were worn throughout the decade.

While the 1920s tend to be cited as the start of the ubiquitous bob, the early 1910s were actually the real start to this popular trend. Some of the first short hairstyles made their premiere

in France. In 1909 Antoine de Paris launched the 20th century fashion for short hair by cutting off French actress Eva Lavalliere's hair into a gamine bob (Philippon, 2013). English dancer Irene Castle also first cut her hair around this time, specifically in 1913 (Ewing, 1974). Some authors reference that she cut her locks due to an appendectomy, while others cite that she cut it because the style was more practical for dancing (Ewing, 1974). Either way, the look caught on and rapidly spread. Eventually, Castle ended up issuing a public apology for the trend because people blamed her for women cutting their hair short. Many women who worked on farms or who aided in the First World War cut their hair into bobs because it was more practical and sanitary yet also a sign of social and economic independence (Ewing, 1974; Gibson, 2014). This look quickly spread to America and the rest of Europe and was worn by stars such as Louise Brooks, Clara Bow and Colleen Moore in the 1920s (Zeitz, 2006). The late 1920s saw the bob become part of popular culture. The controversial style, which is most often accredited to the flapper, was a choice look for the average workingwoman and schoolgirl. Due to the amount of women who made the chop, at the end of the decade, short hair was no longer considered trailblazing, but another part of fashion (Gibson, 2014). One of the most important introductions during this decade was the rise of the beauty shop. With the bob's increasing popularity, salons were introduced to meet the demand of the new female clientele and also "reflected the shift of women's interest in cosmetics and fashion" (Willett, 2000, p. 58).

The Great Depression defined the 1930s era where many Americans were without the basic necessities to live, but women still cared about their looks and copied the Hollywood glamour of the movies. Hair and makeup were much cheaper and more accessible to copy than the clothing items popular actresses wore (Ewing, 1974). At the beginning of the decade, 1930s hairstyles were still fairly short, but as time went on styles began to drift back towards longer

hairstyles. Updos were common for evening and styles had more natural looking waves. Young women also began to dye their hair with more frequency during this decade.

The 1940s saw the introduction of the “Page Boy” haircut. Worn by many film stars, this long look gained popularity throughout the decade (Gibson, 2014). Although it looked simple, the style required a great deal of work and sometimes even padding to achieve the desired outcome. The bangs were rolled under into a tight coil high on the forehead and the rest of the hair was curled under to create this look. Other 1940s hairstyles were styled to be practical and out of the way because many women were working with machinery to help with the WWII effort. Hair was styled in wavy bobs that were still soft and feminine. Later in the decade the victory roll was introduced, this hairstyle, named after the fighter plane maneuvers of the time, was similar to the “Page Boy,” except the curls were rolled up instead of under; grips and combs would help keep these looks in place because other styling tools, such as bobby pins were at a shortage (Hollywood Noir, 2012).

Looks of the 1950s were typically considered as more “young.” Girlish, high ponytails were extremely en vogue at this time. Hairstyle looks for older women were typically more casual and conservative, but always perfectly coiffed. Styles were usually swept up in the front in waves, but the hair was generally still on the shorter side (Ewing, 1974). Curly hair was modeled by Marilyn Monroe and worn by women everywhere.

In the early years of the 1960s, fashion icon and First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy’s hairstyle was extremely popular. Her bobbed, wavy hair created what was known as the “bouffant,” that eventually morphed into the higher and more pronounced “beehive” (Gibson, 2014). This style was back-combed to add volume and height to the top of the head, the rest of the hair was pinned up at the back of the head and then the entire style was lacquered with

hairspray to help keep it in place (Ewing, 1974). The Mods and Beatles, straight out of the United Kingdom, also influenced a great majority of young Americans towards longer hairstyles in the mid 1960s.

Women wore short hair more freely in the mid-to-late 1960s, a time period where social rules were becoming more liberated, and women had steady jobs and incomes. Vidal Sassoon helped guide this transition with his short, geometric haircuts that fit the role of the active, progressive woman (Philippon, 2013). Worn by famous women such as Twiggy, Jean Seberg and Mia Farrow, these pixie-crops were extremely popular. Even forty years after the first bobs of the 1920s, hairdressers still received pushback for cutting women's hair short, even famed hairdresser Vidal Sassoon himself recalled that people would tell him, "You're making young beautiful girls look like boys!" (Phillipon, 2013, p. 286). Longer styles also remained popular looks; long pin-straight hair and loose waves for both men and women symbolized rebellion against authority during the Vietnam War era. These hair looks were especially prevalent at the Woodstock music festival and among young teens to twenty somethings.

The 1970s was a very diverse era for hair. Long hair remained a social norm, which matched the long, flowy and natural looks of the 1970s. Many women wore middle parts in their hair, as this was also popular. The middle of this decade brought styles like the Farrah Fawcett flip into existence, where hair was layered and flipped out around the face, and also introduced Afros and very curly styles, which were extremely common styles among African Americans. The Afro was "the most powerful symbol of Black Power" and also celebrated Black beauty and culture (Kelley, 1997, p. 339). By the end of the 1970s crazy haircuts adorned the heads of punks who chose to battle the mainstream and create their own looks, which often included brightly

colored mohawks and shaved heads to compliment their clothing which consisted of dark colors, leather and chains.

Eighties hairstyles brought the bouffant styles of the 1960s back into style. According to dress historians, Phyllis Tortora & Sara Marcketti (2015), 1980s hairstyles “reflected the diversity of the current fashion” (p. 632) Popular fashion saw full, curly, permed hair on practically every celebrity of the time including singer Madonna and actress Molly Ringwald. Women of the time period followed suit. Bangs were teased up high and hair was as curly and as large as women could make it. Product was the key to making big hair work. Women used lots of hairspray and styling wax to achieve these styles that were calmer variations of punk counterparts worn in the late 1970s. Headbands and scrunchies (elastic bands covered in printed fabric) were often added accents to these styles (Tortora & Marcketti, 2015).

One of the most popular hairstyles to date came about in the 1990s. Inspired by Jennifer Aniston, “The Rachel,” as it came to be known, was modeled after her character in the popular sitcom *Friends*. The shoulder-length hairstyle had layers with grown out fringe and highlights framing the face. The short and choppy shag cut was also well-liked during the 1990s. This cut, created by celebrity hairstylist Sally Hershberger, was made iconic by Meg Ryan. Other popular hairstyles included the Posh Spice bob, hair that flipped out on the ends and long hair pulled back while leaving two little pieces down in the front. Bandanas and headbands polished off these looks. Near the end of the 90s the grunge look popularized long, scraggly unkempt hair.

2000s to present day. Hair offers an opportunity to develop creativity, but because only certain hairstyles are considered “acceptable,” it also presses women to stifle creativity in their hair’s appearance (Weitz, 2004). Although there have been certain styles that have been popular throughout the last sixteen years: long, loose and glossy manes have remained the continued

uniformity among both celebrity persons and the average workingwoman throughout the 2000s and into today (Gibson, 2014). Because celebrity hairstyles are one of the easiest and cheapest looks to copy, women in the United States continue to desire and maintain similar looks to the rich and famous. Whether the look is straight, curly, bohemian wavy or voluptuous, real or fake, long hair has remained in style from early 2000s Christina Aguilera to 2016 Beyoncé.

Although the pixie cut made a small resurgence in 2000 after actress Halle Berry sported a super short pixie for the premiere of *Catwoman*, historically the pixie cut has not made very many strides in popularity. Other celebrities have opted for short pixies over the years, including, Emma Watson, Ginnifer Goodwin, Michelle Williams and more recently Kaley Cuoco, Kate Mara and Lauren Cohen. Yet short hair pales in comparison next to long haired stars like the Kardashian sisters, Beyoncé, Blake Lively, Olivia Wilde and Jennifer Aniston. Most magazine articles and online journals give step-by-steps on how to style long hair but ideas for styling short hair pales in comparison.

Hair and Identity

Although the term *dress* is still ill defined and used interchangeably with the terms fashion and clothing, scholars agree that dress, “includes a wide range of materials and actions that constitute appearance” (Barnes & Eicher, 1992, p.3). It is important to note that hair falls under this category of dress and much has been researched on the connection between dress and identity. Patricia A. Cunningham and Susan Voso Lab, dress scholars, state that in our American culture, “we identify individuals, groups or subgroups and their related characteristics through the clothing symbols associated with them” (1991, p.5). They go on to discuss that there is a need to fit in and be accepted by personal groups or society as a whole. This is where identity and self-perception come into play. For instance, if you identify as a punk, you may dye your

hair black and wear it spiked and chances are, your friends dress similarly. Punk becomes part of your identity and your hairstyle reflects that subculture. Due to hair's visibility, it represents a strong part of a person's identity (Whitbourne, 2015). Hair also "allows us to create or re-create our identity" (Lowe, 2016, p.2). This idea of hair in relation to identity is incredibly important to most people but as previously mentioned hair is particularly important to women (Hiltebeitel & Miller, 1998; Manning, 2011).

Hair in relation to identity is also important when looking from a cultural perspective. For African American, Native American, Latina and women of other cultural ideologies hair is strongly associated with cultural identity (Thompson, 2009; Jefferies, 2014; Rosette & Dumas, 2007). For instance, of African American literature about hair revolves around women coming to terms with their African American identity. One author, Cheryl Thompson in her essay, *Black Women and Identity: What's Hair Got to do with it?* states, "Hair is not just something to play with, it is something that is laden with messages, and it has the power to dictate how others treat you, and, in turn, how you feel about yourself" (2009, para. 5). Not unlike short haired women, Black and African American women are also inundated with images of perceived beauty everywhere they turn: women with long, silky hair. According to the authors of *The Hair Dilemma*, black hair is "naturally kinky, wooly or tightly curled" and the polar opposite of the long, straight hair of the white Western ideal of beauty (Jefferies, 2014; Rosette & Dumas, 2007). With hair that is naturally frizzy and coarse, many of these women cause extreme damage to their hair by chemically straightening, sewing in weaves and wearing lace front wigs. These practices have been known to stunt hair growth, create extreme breakage and cause both temporary and permanent hair loss. Many Black and African American women believe that straight hair and White features are preferable over their own (Rosette & Dumas, 2007). African

American women who choose to make “The big chop,” the term for cutting away old, damaged and chemically straightened hair often have to re-learn to style and take care of their hair in its natural state (Thompson, 2009). Not only do they have to worry about caring for their hair, but it is also common for Black women to worry about whether their hair worn in its natural state will count against them as they enter the job market, because most of the styles worn on natural Black hair (dreadlocks, braids, afros) are frowned upon in the workplace (Wilson, 2013; Rosette & Dumas, 2007; Thompson, 2009). As the documentary *Good Hair* put it, “If your hair is relaxed, White people are relaxed. If your hair is nappy; they’re not happy” (Stilson & Rock, 2009, 11:48).

Native American women (and men) are known for wearing their hair extremely long because for them, hair is an important spiritual matter. According to Native American author Paula Johnstone, Native Americans consider their hair the physical manifestation of their thoughts (2016). It is also a sign of their spiritual health and strength (Aten, 2012). Having long hair also symbolizes many of Native American’s tribal and religious traditions (Ojibwa, 2010). Around the world Holy men and women are known for the length and glory of their hair, their hair held in high value. Many tribes consider dyeing hair as placing your own desires above the thoughts of God, negatively affecting your spirituality and the act of cutting hair is akin to cutting off the flow of thought. It usually only occurs during dramatic life change or when one is in mourning (Johnstone, 2016; Ojibwa, 2010).

Hair has the capability to affect different aspects of a person’s faceted identity especially if its loss is unwanted or unanticipated. Women who are not given the choice to wear short hair or have no hair i.e. women in chemotherapy treatment, women suffering from lupus, alopecia or trichotillomania sometimes have a crisis of identity. Losing their hair is like losing their identity

as a feminine woman. As previously mentioned research shows that the ideal standard of Euro-American beauty is women with long, flowing hair (Rosette & Dumas, 2007). Losing this sense of identity can be very difficult for women to face and often times, instead of bearing their baldness, these women cover their heads with hats, scarves and wigs. Many women have spoken in interviews about how they were more afraid to lose their hair than they were to battle cancer (Marum, 2014; Palmer, 2016). Losing one's hair can be a serious self-esteem blow and losing a major feminine identifier can be devastating. One woman in Oregon, who had breast cancer, said she didn't cry when she found out she had cancer and would lose her breasts, she cried when she found out she would be losing her hair. "That's what made me cry," she said. "When I found out I was losing my hair. That's when I broke down. ... I was OK with (the mastectomy). It didn't really scare me. Losing my hair scared me more than losing my boobs" (Marum, 2014, para. 2). Long hair is hugely part of feminine identity and while some people thrive with cropped hair of their own volition, others can lose a sense of self when it is taken from them.

Gender, Sexuality & Appearance

Gender. On the day that we are born, the doctors and nurses immediately tell our parents whether we are a boy or a girl. Although the definitions for sex and gender have recently been refined, (sex is what genitalia you are born with; gender is how you identify: male, female, androgynous, etc.) the idea of gender, and what gender we identify as, leaves a huge impression on how we present ourselves to the outside world. It affects the colors we wear and even how we are treated, studies have revealed that male babies are treated more roughly than female babies (Kendall, 2017). As we get older and begin to understand our relationship with our gender we decide how we wish to express our gender identity. Dress plays a very important role in our expression of gender but hair especially. Hair carries many social meanings - one important

meaning to note is that hair is one of the most direct identifiers of gender. Dress scholars Joanne B. Eicher and Mary Ellen Roach-Higgins state that “gender distinctions can be clearly communicated by a minimum of manipulations of dress,” they go on to give a prime example that relates to this study, “if the hair of males is expected to be cut short and that of females is expected to grow long in a particular society, the shape and volume of hair immediately communicate to observers the gender of the individual under scrutiny” (1992, p.16). This example is the case with American society ideals. The ability to identify gender quickly and accurately has throughout history been essential for survival and “all cultures have created clear rules of dress and hairstyling to indicate gender and (usually) marital status” (Lowe, 2016, p.6).

Certain hairstyles in American culture (typically long) are regarded as feminine, whereas shorter hairstyles are deemed as masculine. These styles have historically “helped people to identify one another more easily” (Sherrow, 2006, p. xxii). Other authors such as Berg and Neufeld (1951; 2012) claim that hair is inherently a tool to determine who men should choose as their female mate, as long hair suggests health and fertility. Although these assumptions may or may not be true, one idea by scholar Biddle-Perry, is for certain, “the sight of both head and body hair, or its visible absence, operates as a spectacular dynamic in the creation of Western ideals of masculinity and femininity, from its earliest representation in Greek classicism through to contemporary advertising” (2008, p. 99). In Western culture, abundant head hair is an essential visual cue of femininity (Biddle-Perry, 2008) whereas short hair is a challenge to this embedded masculine and feminine polarity (Sherrow, 2006). These ideals of what is masculine and what is feminine are taught to us at a very young age. As blogger Katie Frost (2013) puts it, “On the playground androgynous hairstyles, boys with long hair or girls with short hair, are met with confused stares, or from the braver children, questions like, ‘Are you a boy or a girl?’”

Sexuality. In his book, *Hair* professor of religious studies Scott Lowe states that, anthropologists and other researchers have extensively deliberated on the connection between hair and sexuality (2016). Deborah Tannen, professor of linguistics at Georgetown University considers hair to be a secondary sex characteristic because “more head hair and less facial hair is one of the physical features distinguishing the sexes that begin to appear during puberty signaling sexual maturity” (2015, p.82). Hair is considered to be sexual, especially for women. Long hair tied back is seen as youthful and virginal, but when let loose is seen as erotic (Gibson, 2014). Many women in Jewish, Islamic, and other faiths wear head coverings and due to hair’s erotic nature in those cultures, only spouses and close family ever get to see it.

Sexual identity is sometimes (but not always) distinguishable by choice of hairstyle. The term “butch” came into use in the 1890s to describe “mannish” women. A lesbian was someone “who dressed and acted in ways previously considered reserved for men (Gibson & Meem, 2002). Short hair is still associated with lesbian women who look more masculine and dress in a more masculine style. In her book *Looking Like What You Are*, Lisa Walker strives to answer the questions: what it means to look like a lesbian and what it means to be a lesbian but not look like one. The masculine-type lesbian or butch is more visible to the public eye, which is why there are more stereotypes associated with short hair (2001). This increases the likelihood that women who are straight will be mislabeled as a lesbian for wearing their hair short in what is seen in Euro-American culture as less effeminate.

Appearance. Since the beginning of recorded history people have tended to their appearance and personalized their looks through the styling of their hair. Hair is one of the primary ways people present themselves to the outside world, making it personal and significant. How hair is shaped, styled or cut is a key factor in how humans view themselves and how they

are perceived by the world around them. How we style our hair is one of the most central ways to manage the perceptions of others (Rosette & Dumas, 2007). Our hair defines major aspects of our identities. Elizabeth Benedict, editor of *Me, My Hair & I*, says, “We get that hair is serious. It’s our glory, our nemesis, our history, our sexuality, our religion, our vanity, our joy, and our mortality.” She continues. “There are many things in life that matter more than hair, but in many cases, it defines us, whether we want it to or not” (Smith, 2015, para. 3).

Psychologists and authors Nichola Rumsey and Diana Harcourt say that, “Our physical appearance provides powerful cues for identity and recognition by others” (2005, p.3). That being said an individual’s appearance has a huge impact on how others’ perceive them on traits like competence, amicability, intelligence and trustworthiness (Goffman, 1959). Throughout history, the appearance of hair has carried many social messages, which have changed with time and also across cultures (Weitz, 2004). Hair still plays a psychological role in people lives. While holding only a minor amount of functional significance, hair is extremely important and personal in terms of emotion and social construct (Velasco et al., 2009). It also has the ability to tell others about our occupation, gender, age, ethnicity, values, emotions, and even sexual availability (Weitz, 2004).

Sociologist Goffman (1959) states,

When an individual enters the presence of others, they commonly seek to acquire information about him or to bring into play information about him already possessed.... Information about the individual helps to define the situation, enabling others to know in advance what he will expect of them and what they may expect of him. Informed in these ways, the others will know how best to act in order to call forth a desired response from him (p. 1).

This is a great example of hair’s importance to a person’s overall aesthetic. So much can be inferred merely by a person’s appearance and research shows that hair is a huge part in how we are viewed.

Women with Short Hair

Today's society exalts long, beautiful, healthy head hair as one of the many American cultural standards of female beauty. Since their inception, fashion magazines (and more recently their websites) have been one of the many ways that women have been able to access and follow these standards. Their glossy pages have remained popular as a way to garner information about popular trends, designers and famous personalities. Open to any page in a popular magazine as evidence - there are countless models and featured celebrities with long, "sexy" hair. The models and celebrities who appear in magazines and in the media that do choose to cut their hair face constant critique for their looks, some examples include: Miley Cyrus, Jennifer Lawrence and Pamela Anderson, among others. As further evidence of long hair's impact, commercials are frequently aired advertising hair care products like Garnier Fructis or Pantene Pro V, which carry the taglines "Long & Strong" and "Longer. Stronger. Faster." Even more so, television, movies and webpages on the Internet push this long-haired ideal.

While it is common for women of other cultures (both past and present) to wear shaved or very short hairstyles for different rites of passage, women in America with short hair and especially those with shaved heads are a rarity (Philippon, 2013). Certain women in Afghan regions and also women in Africa and India shave their heads as a sign of mourning (Sherrow, 2006). Other women in India offer their hair as a sacrifice to their god and in some of the tribes of West Africa women with bald heads are considered to be extremely beautiful (Philippon, 2013). The women who shave their heads or cut their hair very short in Western societies typically do so for completely different reasons including: personal aesthetics, rebellion or self-liberation.

Very short hair is deemed as less attractive or altogether unattractive in Euro-American society. In 2012, *Victoria's Secret* model Karlie Kloss cut her hair into a chin-length bob and many fans said that it “wasn’t sexy” and that her “current librarian hair is really not doing her any favors.” Many even said they wouldn’t buy *Victoria's Secret* products because of her haircut (*Daily Mail Reporter*, 2013). This type of reaction to short hair is nothing new. In the late 1990s actress Keri Russell starred in *Felicity*, a highly rated show about a girl attending college at New York University. In the second season the producers and writers had her character cut her hair and ratings dropped significantly. Even though some fans blamed the show switching evenings, many more blamed the dramatic haircut that is still talked about even today, seventeen years later (Han, 2013). Although there are a great deal of online communities praising short-haired women, there are many more combating this act that is according to many against the natural way a woman should look. Many blog posts are dedicated to why women shouldn’t cut their hair short and are some of the first webpages that pop up with a *Google* search. One example of an opinion article states that, “Girls with short hair are damaged,” and another says, “if celebrities can’t pull it off, you can’t either” (Sonofra, 2014; Sterling, 2014).

Since Biblical times, hair has comprised a woman’s “crowning glory,” and the pervasive trans-cultural attitude continues to praise that ideal. A *Daily Mail* poll in 2008 found that 43% of men considered long hair the most beautiful hairstyle on women, whereas pixie cuts were only deemed attractive by 7% of men (Scotti, 2015). Evolutionary psychology also finds that hair length is significantly correlated with female attractiveness in Europe and America (Grammar, Fink, Thornhill, Juette & Runzal, 2002), the longer found to be the most attractive. Results of a different study found that long-haired women’s physical appearance was rated highly even if their facial attractiveness was valued as low (Bereczkei & Mesko, 2006).

The history of American dress illustrates how long hair has remained an accepted norm. Short hair in contemporary American culture settings is frowned upon in almost every place but the work environment. Even though it is seen as less sexy, short hairstyles are considered a more professional look, making a woman look more able and mature (Serico citing Weitz, 2015). Angela de Joseph, a former beauty associate beauty editor for the magazine *Essence*, also says that short hair is generally perceived as more professional and confident, while long hair is associated with youth and sexiness, which can be distracting in the workplace (Serico, 2015). Yet women with short hair or shaven heads have still been stigmatized as masculine, sick, old or unattractive (Biddle-Perry & Cheang, 2008; Neufeld, 2012).

According to author Jo-Ellan Dimitrius, in today's modern society, "a woman with short hair is perceived as confident – not having to hide anything," but it is also believed that short hair is only attractive on women who are physically fit (Serico citing Dimitrius, 2015). Some beauty articles also say that a woman must have a certain face shape or a slender nose to pull off short hair. Plus-size women have recounted that it can be frustrating to get the short hairstyle that they want because stylists say the look won't be flattering to their face or figure (Frost, 2013; Ospina, 2015).

Short hair remains an exceedingly talked about subject. Blogs, Youtube videos, Facebook and Instagram photos showcase dramatic hair changes among many millennial women. Still, negativity surrounding short hair, despite many women wearing their hair this way, still remains.

When looking at past and present research, one of most acceptable forms of short hair or no hair for women is not on their head, but on their body. Since the 1920s, when body modification became more prevalent, women have shaved their underarm hair and their leg hair. Once these parts of the body were revealed with sleeveless dresses and shorter skirts, popular

culture encouraged women to rid themselves of unsightly body hair. As time went on the bikini paved the way for women to get rid of more hair, specifically in the pubic region. For centuries, fine art has depicted a visible absence of pubic hair on naked women and this absence remains part of the female aesthetic (Biddle-Perry, 2008). In this modern era, it is considered gross for women to have hair in these areas.

Our society has idolized the ideal American female body as having long head hair and no body hair. Research shows that women are the most likely to modify their pubic hair to make it extremely short or choose to get rid of it entirely (Sherrow, 2006). This is because body hair is regarded as undesirable in both the medical and cosmetic senses. Landscaped or bald *mons pubis* is not only prevalent within the pornography industry, but is also seen and widely accepted among American women (Sargeant, 2008). This is deemed as “appropriate” and preferred in the concourse of Euro-American culture.

Hair is a crucial factor of self-representation because it is a display of the outer self (Baumeister, 1986; Biddle-Perry & Cheang, 2008). As previously stated, hair has been studied for its symbolism, politics, and power, among other things (Zdanty, 1999) but research on short hair due to a woman's personal choice is almost non-existent. Past research in regards to hair (not just head hair) has varied greatly. In terms of hair removal there are many scholarly papers regarding the modification/removal of pubic hair (Biddle-Perry, 2008; Sargeant, 2008; Sherrow, 2006). There have also been articles relating to hair and identity with Black women (Rosette & Dumas, 2007; Thompson, 2009). Some of the only studies in regards to short hair have focused on women with hair loss, whether due to chemotherapy, alopecia or other illness (Dua, 2013; Trusson & Pilnick, 2016), but other bald, nearly bald or short-haired women are under represented in research because they are the minority of women (Koppelman, 1996).

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

This chapter on methodology contains information about the methodological approach, participants, data collection, data analysis, validity and credibility.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is defined as “development of concepts which help us understand social phenomena in natural (rather than experimental) settings, giving due emphasis to meanings, experiences and views of the participants” (Pope & Mays, 1995, p. 42-45). The use of qualitative analysis leaves room for broader research questions and is generally more theoretical in comparison to its quantitative counterpart. Qualitative data are related to ideas and concepts and are not easily reduced to numbers. Qualitative research is the best fit for my topic because it allows for the stories of short haired women to be told. More information can be gathered by hearing stories from real women rather than using numbers to poll them about their thoughts and feelings. The emphasis of this study is finding the meaning behind why women wear their hair short and hearing their stories, these aspects cannot and should not be reduced to numbers.

Methodological Approach

An autoethnography combines aspects of autobiography and ethnography and uses hindsight “to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience” (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, para. 1). Many authors of autoethnographic writings use journals, interviews, recordings or texts to analyze the experience in addition to their personal musings, which is also the case with this study.

This research will combine the use of autoethnography with phenomenology.

Phenomenology deals with the phenomenon of any research subject, in the case of this study, the phenomenon of women with short hair. According to a lecture on phenomenology given at Sonoma State University, phenomenology is “a way of unfolding the dimensions of human experience: how we exist and live in our world.” The process examines two things. The first, “What is distinct in each person's experience” second, “what is common to the experience of groups of people who have shared the same events or circumstances” (Sonoma State University, 2005, para. 8)? A phenomenological approach is used to better understand a phenomenon through the gathering of voices and experiences of others, which leads to making the experiences better known and more visible.

The Participants

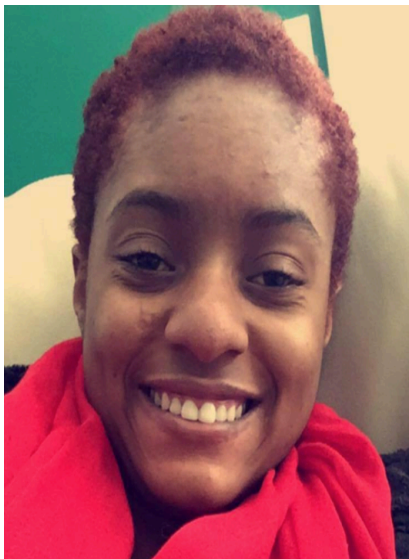
The criteria for the participants were that they are a millennial-generation woman, aged 18—35, who is currently wearing her hair shaved, buzzed or cut in a short pixie cut. They could be of any ethnicity but must be American. Below, listed by age, from youngest to oldest, are the eighteen women who participated in this thesis. The youngest Alex, is 18 and the oldest Isabel, is 33. Pseudonyms were given to each of the participants, some chose their own name and others had names given to them. Of the eighteen, nine were from Georgia, two were from Texas, three were from Chicago, two were from Iowa, one was from Minnesota, one was from California and one was from Rhode Island. Most of their ethnicities were white, but two were South Asian (Indian), one was Latina and one was Black. Sexual orientation was a huge topic that was brought up this thesis, so I believe it is important to also know the breakdown of different sexual orientations. Two women identified as lesbian, one identified as queer, two identified as bisexual, one identified as asexual and twelve identified as straight.



Alex – age 18



Mae – age 21



Abigail – age 21



Nikita – age 22



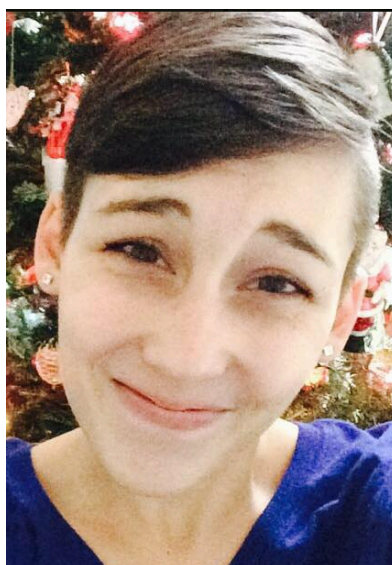
Shweta – age 23



Kelly – age 24



Fiona – age 24



Kirsten – age 24



Julie – age 25



Hazel – age 26



Paloma – age 25



Maya – age 26



Helena – age 27



Spencer – age 29



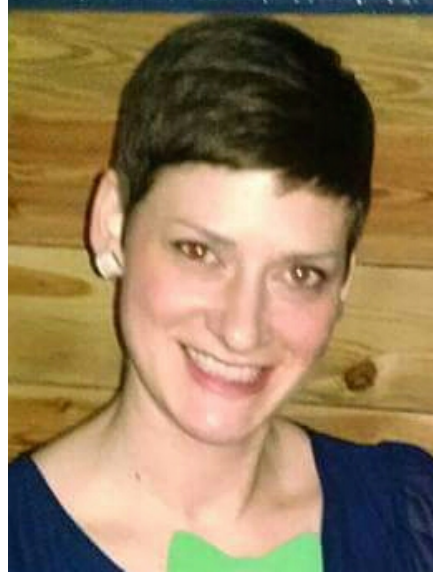
Sam – age 29



Quinn – age 30



Roxy – age 31



Isabel – age 33

Data Collection: In-depth Interviews

In-depth semi-structured interviews were the main source of data collection for this thesis because they allow participants to tell their own story in their own expressions (Anderson & Jack, 1991). A guide containing the questions to be asked was used to keep the conversation on track and maintain consistency throughout the interviews. The majority of participants for this study were collected through convenience sampling, meaning participants were amassed through many ways that were convenient to myself as the researcher. This included: personal contacts, random passersby or through social media comprised of, but not limited to Facebook, Instagram, Reddit & YouTube. Due to the fact that short hair is less common than long hair, convenience sampling was the best way to achieve participants for this study. Snowball sampling, “a non-probability sampling technique that is used by researchers to identify potential subjects in studies where subjects are hard to locate” also occurred when participants I interviewed gave names of other short haired women who then also chose to participate in the interviews (Explorable, 2016, para. 1). Snowball sampling was how I found two of my participants but was not the primary way I found participants for this study.

Participants were given the option to choose the location of their interview. Five of the participants from far away states (Iowa, Minnesota, California & Texas) were performed over Skype. Another interview was given in my home, another was at the participant’s home and the rest of the eighteen participant interviews were given in various coffee shops around the Athens-area. After the study was explained and all questions about the study were answered, participants were asked to give their physically signed or electronically signed consent form, along with consent for whether their interview may be recorded and whether they will allow themselves to be photographed/submit a photo for publication in the thesis, for academic presentations or for

other publications. After these were received, participants were given interviews between the months of June and September. Interviews ranged from 16 minutes to over 2 hours and were first transcribed and then coded.

Data Analysis

Data analysis for qualitative methods is not guided by universal rules like statistical analysis. Unlike its counterpart, it is highly dependent on the thoughts, perceptions and biases of the researcher. It is also likely to change and adapt as important themes emerge from the data (NSF, 1997). I used my own data analysis by placing names, quotes/codes, themes and objectives, which were obtained from the transcripts, into an Excel file and sorting them accordingly.

After the in-depth semi-structured interviews were completed and transcribed, the interviews were carefully read over multiple times and coded using an open coding process. When I read the transcriptions, I wrote annotations next to quotes that summed up the text, for example, words like “confidence,” “reaction,” “addicting,” etc. I placed every quote that had an annotation into an Excel file and then sorted them via objectives, common words, and phrases to uncover common themes. There was usage of both inductive and a priori codes. This means that concepts were identified from the raw data (inductive) but also looked at through the lens of the questions asked (a priori). Some of the themes like “addicting” and “intimidating” were inductive whereas “confidence” and “criticisms” were expected (a priori) themes. As patterns started to form from these categories, themes were created to represent these similar patterns (Saldana, 2016). This led to findings about the motivations, perceptions, experiences and identities of women with short hair.

Validation & Credibility

Qualitative data should aim for, “quality, credibility & trustworthiness” (Dipeolu, 2010, slide 3). To make sure that my data analysis is correct I will use many different forms of validation. The first form used will be saturation. Saturation is used to describe the period in time in which no novel information or concepts emerge from the data. This is the point where I stopped interviewing women because the themes and concepts that have emerged are fully supported (Dipeolu, 2010). The next validation that was used is reflexivity. Reflexivity is being knowledgeable in my own biases and doing my best to not let them affect the questions I ask. Due to the nature of qualitative research, no researcher can fully put aside their personal beliefs, biases and feelings. Even so, it was important to make sure that I was not swaying participants to say exactly what I wanted them to say, even if it exactly explains my phenomena. This was done via the use of bracketing, “a method used in qualitative research to mitigate the potentially deleterious effects of preconceptions that may taint the research process (Tufford & Newman, 2012, p.80).

Lastly, since there is use of both phenomenology and autoethnography in my research this creates another form of validity called methods triangulation, which occurs when multiple methods are used to analyze data such as the following (Write, n.d.). Phenomenology, which works from a ground up perspective lets themes emerge that were perhaps not originally intended, to see what comes from the data. Phenomenology is the study of a phenomenon. To help better understand the phenomenon this methodology garners information through the voices and experiences of others. On the other hand, autoethnography has a goal to also make meaning through relation to self. In this study, I used the women’s stories and related them back to my own experiences and perspective of having short hair. This relates my own experiences to those

of my participants. Both methodologies are important in my analysis, but the fact that they are different helps add credibility to my work.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Through a series of eighteen interviews, it emerged that within each objective, with the exception of one, there were both positive and negative themes. I have labeled which of these themes were considered positive and which were considered negative. Some themes have both positive and negative, while others only a negative theme or a positive theme.

What Motivates Women to Cut Their Hair Short?

There were a variety of reasons why these women made the decision to cut their hair, which was to be expected. Obviously, no two women will be exactly the same in their reasoning for wearing short hair. There are all different people with their own thoughts, views and opinions. Still, many women did have similar reasons as to why they decided to either keep their hair short from a young age or make the transition from long hair to short hair. This section will be focusing on the top four reasons why these women in particular chose to cut their hair short.

Change (positive). Philosopher Heraclitus once said that, “There is nothing permanent except change” (*BrainyQuote*, 2016). Change, unsurprisingly, was the overwhelming response these women gave on why they chose to cut their hair. Over half of my participants, eleven to be exact revealed that they cut their hair due to various forms of change. Psychologist Dr. Patricia A. Farrell says that, “Hair is one of the most important aspects of our expression of who we are and who we want to be seen as. Dramatic haircuts would indicate a drastic change and then fit into that new persona we’re creating” (Lindsay, 2016). The women of this study also transformed their hairstyle to fit new personas, in this case change. As I mentioned in my

introduction, how I felt inside about my looks did not match my exterior – I felt like I looked like everyone else. I chose to cut my hair off to fit my artistic and creative persona, one of confidence and class, I wanted that change. One woman, Kelly, a PhD student from the Midwest, put her idea of change into perspective for me. For her, change was all about feeling more like an adult:

Um, I just remember wanting a change, it was the end of my freshman year and I was like...I'm an adult now. And for whatever reason it felt like a really adult thing to do. To just like cut all my hair off.

I can relate to Kelly's experience myself. The first time I decided to go pixie short was my freshman year of college. College is a time for finding yourself outside of your family and high school friends. It is typically the first season people make big decisions for themselves. I can recall maybe half a dozen women who lived on my dorm floor who decided to get pixie cuts their freshman year of college. It seemed like an appropriate time and place for a change such as this to occur. You live in a new town with new people, you can re-create yourself to fit whatever mold you desire. Maya is another woman who chose to first cut her hair short to represent entering adulthood during her first year of college.

The first time I did it was back when I was a freshman in college and so I was really nervous about it and there I did it really kinda long in the front, like towards my chin and it stacked up and then the back was kinda buzzed, it was a long buzz so I could spike it.

But I think it was like my first, "Oh I'm grown now, I'm in college. Like you know..." Many of the other women I talked to also matched life events with drastic haircuts. Quinn, an administrative assistant from the South decided to cut her hair off to represent the drastic change in her weight.

About two years ago I lost almost 80 pounds and halfway through that weight-loss journey I thought, 'You know what? I'm going to cut my hair. All the way off.

Absolutely all the way off.' So I did.

As someone who has personally lost fifty pounds, I can understand why Quinn would want to change her look to match what she felt. On the show *The Biggest Loser*, near the middle of the season the finalists who have typically lost fifty pounds or more are given makeovers to further emphasize the change in their weight. This gives them an opportunity to see how far they have come. For Quinn, it represented,

The change that I was going through internally and physically. And I had never cut my hair that short and I was turning over a new leaf and doing a whole bunch of 'nevers'.

Never have I evers.

Sam, a plant biologist, just graduated with her PhD this past spring and before her short pixie haircut wore dreadlocks for eleven years. I asked her if she cut her hair to look more professional as she searched for jobs, research shows that short hair in our modern American culture is seen as more professional (Serico, 2015) but she told me that this was not the case; rather it was change that motivated her.

People are just so judgy in the professional setting and basically wrote me off. [Speaking of when she had dread locks]. So I kind of was like...I don't know. I always felt the need to keep that going a little bit because I'm like, 'Screw you, I'm not going to change my appearance for people to judge me in a different way.' Because I just find that really annoying, you know? That people actually do that is kind of f-ed up. So no, it wasn't for professionalism or anything. I was ready for a change, I think. I was ready to have normal hair again.

For Sam, normal hair meant having hair she could run her hands through. Dreadlocks are hair that is combed and tangled to form their own (usually thick) locks and is traditionally worn by people of the Rastafarian religion, but has also been widely adopted by African Americans (Tortora & Marcketti, 2015). Sam's dreadlocks were another hairstyle that goes against society norms, but to her, having a short pixie cut is much more "normal" than having dreadlocks as a Caucasian female. Heather Turgeon, an LA-based psychotherapist states that, "changing hairstyles is really common during life transitions" (Black, 2010, para. 2). Isabel, a teacher from Georgia decided to opt for a change after her wedding, which is a large life transition.

Well, I did it right after I got married and I guess I thought I needed a change, I, my hair is very fine and so I never really ever was able to do anything with it anyway. My mom's a big tomboy and so she never like taught me how to do hair or anything like that.

She went on to say that she always wore her hair in a messy bun, so it made more sense for her to cut it than to constantly wear it up. Another participant, Roxy, likened herself to a hair chameleon, always changing her hair for the sake of changing her hair. She told me that her hair had been everything from pixie and platinum to a deep shaved side part with red ombre and everything in between.

It's fun and I don't call myself an extrovert but I do things like that that make people stand at attention. I don't do it for other people but it's ... I wanted change so I did it. I did it because I could.

Julie was another woman who cut her hair because it was what she wanted. She decided to make the switch from long hair to short hair around her 25th birthday.

I just really wanted to. I wanted a change, I wanted to try it and I always thought I didn't really have the face for it because I have a pretty round face, but at the end of the day it's

just hair and it'll grow back and I mean it's gonna look how it's gonna look regardless, you know. I mean, who guarantees me that it looked good when it was long with my face?

Change (negative). Not every participant cut their hair off due to positive changes like the women previously mentioned, some experienced break ups and then decided to cut their hair. Paloma, a graduate student at Columbia, cut her hair after she ended a serious relationship and moved to a new city. This would make sense as hairstylist Eloise Cheung, in an interview with website HelloGiggles said that, “Dramatic hair changes are a way of shedding the past and moving on,” (Lindsay, 2016) whereas psychotherapist Turgeon says that hairstyle changes often occur around the time of a career change or break up (Black, 2010). Although this is true for some women, this idea of drastically changing one’s hair is a stereotype. Only two of the eighteen women credited the change in their hair to a breakup:

I think it was just time and I’d really been thinking about it and it was kind of an impulsive thing and I was like, ‘I’m going to do it!’ I had just moved to a new city and I had just...I know this is a really weird, stereotypical thing that people always talk about but I had just ended a serious relationship and I was like, ‘I feel like I need something that’s going to help me start fresh in a real way. Like in a way that I can remember every day when I look in the mirror.’ So I went for it and I got a pixie cut.

Fiona, a Client Service Coordinator in the film industry also cut her hair in the midst of tough circumstances. When I asked her how she had worn her hair for the past five years she mentioned that she’d cut her hair short at two different points in her life, when she was twelve and then again in 2013:

I was clicking around at work one day and I...this also happened to come right after a serious breakup which sounds so cliché....That was a time in my life when a lot of things were changing. I think I felt a loss of control so I was like, ‘Well, I’ll cut my hair and I’ll have control of that.’

Even though hair is public, it is also private and can be a source of control when life seems out of control (Black, 2010). I think the idea of hair symbolizing life change is important to this study. Even when the change is perhaps something negative, like with Paloma or Fiona’s experiences of break-ups, they still managed to feel very positive about their haircuts, both mentioning that their short hair made them happy and also made them feel more like themselves. That sense of control in their hair offered them the opportunity to move forward.

It’s what I wanted (positive). Like most things in life cutting hair is a personal choice. Women have not always had the choice to do what they want with their bodies and for some they still do not. These women, some against their parents and all against cultural beauty norms chose to cut their hair because it was what they wanted. Alex, my youngest participant talked about how she had wanted short hair for as long as she could remember, even though she’d always had long hair past her waist.

I always wanted it short. I found tweets of myself tweeting like years ago saying, ‘oh I want my hair short so bad, it would be so much fun’ ...I remember as a kid wanting it probably because of like Pink.

For this participant, many people claimed that she cut her hair due to her sexuality (she is a self-proclaimed lesbian), yet she said that this was not true. She made the decision because she wanted to. The decision was a conscious choice of her own volition.

Some of the women found encouragement from their friends for their desire to cut their hair. Such is the case with Shweta who was feeling exoticized by the men around her:

I was, at the time living with one of my friends, she's Korean. And she buzzed her head at that time. And I was like you feel so free and at the time I still wasn't out or queer and I was like I need that like you know, especially as like an Indian women I feel like I had been exoticized a lot for my hair and I just wanted to let go of that objectification by cutting it off.

Thus, by cutting her hair she turned something negative into something positive for herself. Julie, mentioned previously, also had a friend help encourage her to do what she wanted with her hair:

I had been wanting to cut it for a long time and that last summer, I was living with a friend who had short hair and I guess living with her finally encouraged me and pushed me to do it.

Other women, far braver than myself, didn't need the confirmation or push from others, Isabel made the decision all on her own, "You know and so like it was like a, 'I'm a grown up. I can cut my hair if I want.'" She went on to say that friends and family were pretty shocked, but that it didn't bother her. Roxy was similar, she told me that she'd been on her own and independent for a long time and any decision she made was for herself, this also applied to her hair, "I wanted to. I think that was what my mom always told me, 'It's just hair. It'll grow back.' When I was in middle school/high school, it was something fun that I could change."

There was something strong about these women cutting their hair because they wanted to. Many knew they were going against beauty or cultural norms expected of them and cut their hair anyway. There was a general consensus of nervousness before the cut, but they made a choice and cut their hair for themselves.

It's what I wanted (negative). One of the emerging themes related to this topic was people asking my participants why they had cut their hair. Two separate conversations during interviews were practically one in the same. Mae, stated that people frequently ask her why she cut her hair:

Mae: "A lot of people will ask me, like, "Why did you cut it?".

Paige: Mmhmm. What's the reasoning you give them?

Mae: "I wanted to."

Paige: Some people will not take that for an answer.

Mae: They will not! Some people think that it's all their business."

Julie also had people ask her why she cut her hair.

Julie: "One of my friends, his mom, who has always loved my hair too. She was really sad that I cut it. Yeah. When I went to see her. She was like, "oh no, why?" That's usually what I got, "why?"

Paige: What was your reasoning when people asked you?

Julie: Because I wanted to, that's it. I don't owe it to anyone to explain what I do with myself."

Deciding what these women wanted to do with their hair is a personal choice, but this question of “why,” further proves that hair is public and people will always have something to say about what we do to our hair. (Weitz, 2004; Black, 2010). Nikita revealed to me that when cutting your hair, or in her case buzzing it off, people usually want you to have a reason. She chose to participate in a charity event called St. Baldrick's, where participants shave their heads in hopes

of raising money for children's cancer research but she revealed to me that she had had the desire to cut all of her hair off for no reason other than want:

I actually really wanted to buzz it off but you can't just buzz off your hair because that's kind of going full-Britney [Spears]. You can't just shave your entire head and expect no one to be like, "Are you sick? Are you okay or are you mentally..."

She was really surprised when I told her I had buzzed off my hair "just because" but I can understand why she would be worried about the perceptions of others. This was something I also noticed and was one of the greatest deterrents to me when I wanted to buzz my hair. I did not have a reason for buzzing my hair off such as for a charity or because I was supporting someone battling cancer, I did it because I wanted to. Still, I was concerned about what other people would say and think about me because there are definitely negative stigmas associated with short hair like men won't like it (Scotti, 2015) or people will think I'm sick (Koppelman, 1996).

Even with potentially negative stigmas, these women were and are not afraid to wear their hair how they want it to look. As Hazel put it, "It's just something on my head and if it's there I might as well make it interesting."

Management (negative). The last major reason women gave for cutting their hair short was due to management. One participant said that someone could have the best haircut in the world, but if the style didn't suit their hair type and face it would practically be worthless. Other women tended to agree, even without ever hearing this thought from Maya. These women who cut their hair due to management decided their hair was too thick, thin or damaged to maintain long tresses. Abigail, who buzzed her hair about a year ago and has kept it relatively short since said,

It just wasn't healthy anymore because I had put too much color in it. It was just becoming a hassle because I just didn't like how it looked so I hated doing it. I was just like, 'No.' A burden, really, so I just wanted to shave it off and start fresh.

Cutting her hair also gave her the opportunity to in her words, be rebellious. "I just kind of did it anyways because I was like, "I want to do this and I'm going to do it. I want to be rebellious. I'm going to shave my head." Kelly also thought her hair was hard to take care of, there was too much of it to deal with properly:

So I was just kind of sick of it being long and it was hard to maintain and like I said I have super thick hair. So when it's really long it's really, really heavy. So even when it's shoulder length like a normal human being, it's like an excessive amount of hair on my head. So it was just difficult too do things with.

Quinn on the other hand viewed her hair as being too baby fine. "I have a lot of hair and it's very thin, very fine. A lot of baby hair, so it doesn't look good that long. It's stringy...like cheese." She mentioned that she had kept it long for most of her life and had to constantly do things like scrunch or style it to keep it looking nice.

Maya felt that she had the same problem, "I have really thin hair, so it [long hair] wasn't a great look for me." She grew out her hair for her wedding and soon after she tied the knot she went back to short hair because she felt it suited her best. She even said that most of her fellow roller derby friends cannot even remember what she looked like with long hair. Her short hair is the best representation of herself.

How Women View Themselves with Short Hair

Empowerment and liberation (positive). Coco Chanel was one of the first designers to cut her hair into a bob in the 1920s. She was very in tune with the era and said, “A woman who cuts her hair is about to change her life” (*Harper’s Bazaar UK*, 2015). I think that this quote is still relevant today, especially for these women. The next theme that emerged was that these women feel empowered by their choice of hairstyle. Alex recognized that in past women did not cut their hair short very often, but today there is more freedom to do what you want:

I think it's empowering almost, I think it's cool. You know. Like back in the day girls cannot have short hair and now it's just like *clicks tongue* ‘Whatever. We do what we want.’

She recognizes that her hair is empowering for a reason, women did not have all the rights they have today. As previously mentioned in the literature review, people were angry with Irene Castle for bobbing her hair insisting that she was the cause for the bobbed hair craze in the 1920s. Many women in this time period were forced to live according to the man of the house’s (whether it be father or husband) rules, this was the first time when they finally began stepping out on their own. Hazel talked about how having your hair however you wish for it to look should be empowering in and of itself,

I thought hair was supposed to empower a woman or a person, it doesn't have to be a woman. But we've talked about women specifically. I thought that hair was supposed to like ... no matter what it is. Short, long, no-hair, all the hair, whatever it is. I thought the point of it, or what should be the point of it is to empower a person, not just have it on your head.

Hazel had very strong opinions when it came to self-empowerment. Her blog encourages the love of art, coffee, food and body positivity followed with a heavy dosage of female empowerment.

Paloma talked about her buzzed hair and how the action is what made it empowering. She talked about her self-confidence as well, saying that she didn't "feel like Beyoncé" every day but that that gives her the opportunity to feel even more empowered because even when she has a bad day her choice was important:

But I think that invokes a different kind of confidence. And I think the act itself ... just like the act and the empowerment that comes with it [cutting your hair] because it really feels like you're taking charge of something ... that builds confidence too, right? Like, "I don't look great but I did this thing that meant a lot to me. That was important to me so I'm going to do it."

Fiona and Roxy talked about the cycles of their hair and how each time it has been liberating for them to experience. There is a sense of both a physical and symbolical weight being lifted off of them after they cut their hair. Fiona said, "I think both times I just felt really liberated. I felt like myself, she went on to say, "it was a very liberating experience when I cut it because it was me controlling my body, not someone else." Roxy said, "It's happened multiple times when I've grown it out and chopped it off. It is very liberating. You can't really hide after you do it." Kelly agreed saying, "It was very empowering. And very like freeing in a weird way."

Addicting (positive). One of the most surprising themes to emerge from this study was the idea of short hair as an addiction. Addiction normally has a negative connotation, but as Reef Karim, an assistant clinical professor at UCLA puts it, "Our current society craves individuality and self expression. And now people wear their artistic expression" (Crandall, 2015, para. 22).

His quote is not talking about hair, but rather about tattoos. Still, I think with this idea the thought could easily be comparable. These women self-express through their hair. Many of the women I interviewed also had tattoos and compared their haircut experience to the tattoo one, claiming both are addicting. Although there's no hard and fast evidence that tattoos are in fact addicting, about 32% of Americans claim them as such (Crandall, 2015). And about 27% of my participant population claimed getting their haircut or cutting their hair was an addiction of sorts, or as Kirsten put it, "my little fix."

Both Roxy and Hazel have had short hair for most of their lives. Roxy describes her hair addiction:

I just kept cutting it off until it got about to my chin and then late middle school - high school it kind of ranged from chin-length to a full pixie-cut. I tell people I have hair-ADD and I'll just go and get it chopped off.

Going to the salon is a full on experience for her and the salon knows Roxy well. She mentioned to me how whenever she goes to get her hair done, stylists will ask her what she's going to do next. She loves the feeling and has a to-do list for her hair, adding pixie styles she sees on other people or on celebrities.

Hazel's short, platinum blonde hair feels the most like her, although she varies lengths and how she styles it, she's never gone back to long hair:

The longest I've ever had my hair was to my shoulders and then I was eight and I remember when I got my short haircut and ever since then I was just like, 'That's me. I'm hooked,'" She went on to make the comparison to tattooing, "I feel like it's an addicting thing. Once you do it...I don't know, there's something ... people don't believe me. It's

like getting tattoos. People don't believe me, but it's one of those things that you do and you're like, "Man, I just want to do more of it."

A lot of the women I talked to liked their short hair so much that they claimed they do not think they'll ever have long hair again. Kelly was one of those people, "I feel kind of boring, but I've literally had the same hairstyle for five years. Well, four and a half, but I love it and like I don't think I'll ever go back to long hair."

When describing her hair history, Alex ended with, "So, yeah. Then I cut my hair and now I don't think I ever want long hair again." Spencer was another participant that has kept her hair short for a long time and even tried a buzz cut once, she went through different lengths throughout college, but since the pixie cut she said that she hasn't ever even thought of going back.

For Kirsten it is all about newness, "I guess I always just wanted something different. I always wanted to try something new and bolder." When I interviewed her she was starting to grow her hair out, but she mentioned that she did not know if she'd last the grow-out process, which I can attest is long and tedious.

I think I can agree with the consensus of these women, there is something extremely satisfying about getting your haircut. For some, it is a home away from home, for me it is a place where I can relax and always come out looking and feeling my best. Short hair needs more frequent trips to the salon to stay looking neat, so the fact that it feels addicting can be relished in with every trip to the salon.

How Women with Short Hair Perceive how Others View Their Hair

Criticisms (negative). One of the scariest parts about getting a new haircut is waiting to see the reactions from fellow friends, colleagues and family. We know that hair is extremely important and personal in terms of emotion and social construct (Velasco et al., 2009), so if someone you love does not like your haircut this can cause tension in relationships as we will see is the case with a few of my participants. Our physical appearance also helps aid in our recognition (Rumsey & Harcourt, 2015), so when we look different than what is expected we can come off as unrecognizable. Since some people do not like change, this can also cause issues. My parents were one of the largest hurdles for me cutting my hair. My mom wanted a reason for my decision to buzz my hair and my dad has never been very fond of short hair on women. They have generally been supportive of my past hairstyles, but my buzz cut was seemingly more difficult for them to handle, so I had a feeling other women would experience the same types of concerns from their own families. Hazel tended to have the most controversy with her parents, but especially her mother. In her essay, *Why Mothers and Daughters Tangle Over Hair*, Dr. Deborah Tannen, a professor at Georgetown University reveals that mothers are some of the biggest critics of their daughters' hair. She goes on to say that mothers often feel that they have a right, if not the obligation to say something to their daughter about their hair because they want to ensure that everything goes well for their daughters in life and she knows that appearance matters (2015). Hazel told me multiple stories about comments that were made about her hair and how she is always fearful to see her mother after a haircut:

Honestly, I felt nervous about seeing my mother. That's a very honest fear. Actually, I fear seeing her pretty much after anything. After I get any tattoos done, after I got my septum pierced, every time I get a haircut. This is making her sound like a... she is a

judgmental person. We all are. I think she had a very specific way about how her daughter was going to look and I ended up not going on that route. It keeps getting shorter, too. She's like, 'Is it ever going to grow out?' I'm like, 'No.'

She also mentioned that her mother likes it when she wears wigs for opera and always comments on how nice Hazel looks with long hair: "My mom and I are complete opposites, like oil and water, it just doesn't mix sometimes. I think what hurts me more is she doesn't see what other people see in my short hair and my style." This proves to be frustrating for Hazel, but she is not the only woman frustrated by her parent's reactions to her hair. A few of the women mentioned that their mothers are very Southern, insinuating that in their opinion, some Southern people have a different mindset. Such is the case with Mae, "I know when I go back to my mom again she's very traditionally Southern and so she sort of hates my hair." Fiona's mom also had an opinion:

My mother is a very Southern woman and very progressive in a lot of ways but I think she falls victim to outside perception, so when I first told her she was like, "Oh, boys won't like that if you have really short hair."

She also mentioned that her mom was the person most invested in her hair, which she found to be frustrating,

I cut it too short recently and got kind of upset and remember, she was with me at the time and I was putting on a brave face because the woman who cuts my hair I've known forever and didn't want to hurt her feelings, but my mom kind of didn't help. She tried to help but she was like, 'Don't cut it too short. She's so muscle bound, I don't want her looking too manly.' So that was really frustrating.

I know that my mother had her own concerns; she felt that I needed a reason to cut my hair short.

She was invested in my haircut even though I didn't necessarily want her to be involved.

Shweta's parents are Indian and her mother has a more conservative and cultural perspective on short hair:

My mom, she's extremely conservative so bless her heart but she was like how will you get married with your short hair? *laughs* She's also like said short hair doesn't look pretty when you wear Indian clothing, it doesn't look traditional. Now it just looks too, it doesn't look correct or right. I'm like, that's the point.

Paloma, like Shweta is also Indian and her parents were not fond of her short hair either. They had a lot of similarities in how their parents reacted:

My dad was like, 'I just feel sad. Do you know what this means to us? You had such nice hair.' I think my dad even later, as we were talking about it, was like, 'You look really ugly.' I was like, 'You can't say that! That's so mean!' I think there's this thing in Indian culture that's almost grossly, brutally honest.

Her mother also took issue with her shaved head:

I didn't Facetime with my parents for a while. My mom later told me, 'I know you did this.' She's like, 'It just made us really sad.' I think for them it was a totally different cultural thing and they didn't see eye-to-eye with my motives.

Other women had problems with their extended family. In Isabel's case, her male cousins made fun of her short hair:

Some of the guys they kinda sideways comments I guess sometimes like I can't even really think of...I kinda block it out I'm sure. Since I don't really super get along with

them, but uh, yeah, they would say like, 'that looks like your hair...' and they'll point to like a boy or something like that. You know.

Abigail, a black woman, had family that was disappointed that she cut her hair short and wore it naturally, which further perpetuates that Black and African American women believe that straight hair and White features are preferable over their own (Rosette & Dumas, 2007). Abigail chose to go against the grain:

It was kind of hard because when I first went natural, I remember some of my family members who were like, 'Oh, what's wrong with your hair? Why don't you comb it? It just looks so wild.' And it's just like, 'Well, this is the hair that comes out of my head.'

Her cousin also told her that her hair was too short and that it makes her look like a boy.

These comments and criticisms from family members further the idea that short hair is seen as more masculine, even though some of these women are very feminine (Sherrow, 2006).

For some women, the workplace or school environment is the place they deal with most criticisms when it comes to their hair. Maya said that a lot of her conservative coworkers (she works in a bank) comment on her hair the she should keep it longer and Roxy, who is currently looking for a new position, feels like she didn't get a job due to her hairstyle even though she was more than qualified:

So there's one job specifically that I don't think I got because of my hair. It was a very traditional, not even older gentleman. He's probably five to maybe ten years older than me but very traditional and it was when it was blonde and a faux-hawk. I'm always put-together, I'm always showered and clean and I don't think it was ... it was something that turned him off. If there's something, I just kind of feel like that was the reason.

Hazel has dealt with negativity from more than just her family her graduate school environment has also been hostile:

I've even have teachers say, 'Why do you make it so hard for yourself?' When I shaved off my hair and came back to school, my voice teacher, like verbatim, said to me, 'Why are you making this harder? People are going to think you're a big dyke.' That is literally what she said to me.

We know that gender norms are consistent across cultures (Lowe, 2016). American gender norms dictate men with short hair and women with long hair. The few participants that worked with young children experienced how early gender norms start to form in our culture. Kirsten gave an example:

Oh and the funny thing is, until I uh, moved up here. I worked with little kids a lot and I got asked a lot, 'Are you a girl or are you a boy?' It confuses them because girls generally have long hair and boys have short hair. And I dress kinda tom-boyish, too. So I guess that kinda doesn't help.

Isabel, a teacher, tries to teach the children in her classroom that hair is just hair and girls can have short hair and boys can have long hair,

They cannot wrap their heads around my hair. Like, cause when you're a little girls, girls have long hair. Disney princesses have long hair...I had this girl once and she was in Pre-K and about every 2 months or so or month she would ask me if I was a boy. And I'd say, 'No, I'm a girl.' And then she'd look at me very confused and say, 'Well you have short hair.' And I'd say 'Yeah, I'm a girl with short hair and you're a girl with long hair, you know.' And I said, 'Some boys have long hair' and she was like, *cocks head to side* 'What? huh?' She did not believe me. But yeah every month or so she'd be like

‘You boy? Miss Isabel, you boy?’ And yeah I have another little boy this year...Precious little thing and he'd always just be like, ‘Miss Isabel, you have boy hair.’ And I'd be like ‘Yeah, well I just have hair. You know.’ But it's funny that that young they're already like boys do this, girls do this.

The gender norms are very strong, even among young kids. Our culture perpetuates masculinity and femininity through hair (Biddle-Perry & Cheang, 2008). When men have long hair or women have short hair it is confusing for children (Frost, 2013).

As you can see, several of these women have faced negativity from family members, co-workers and even strangers. They are also forced to fight expected gender norms every day. Although they face discrimination, they remain positive and choose to wear their hair in a way that makes them happy, without caring what others have to say. Criticisms can be mean and downright hurtful, but compliments are also a daily part of life for these women with short hair.

Compliments (positive). The majority of these women surround themselves with the support of their friends, especially when their family is less than thrilled about their choice of hairstyle. These were the people who were the most open and positive about my participant's haircuts. My friends were also some of the most supportive about my hair and even though I would have liked my hair without their compliments, I appreciated their support when my family was still freaking out about my extremely short hair.

Mae was one of the first to say that she had very complimentary friends who liked her hair, “A lot of my friends really love it and think that it's really fun and really cute.” She went on to say that they hardly recognize her with long hair; there is comfort in the fact that they see her personality in her hair. Alex's friends, the majority of which are in the online community were also very positive:

They had such a great reaction. They left so many nice comments on all of my online posts and they were like ‘Wow, we need more photos - post more, post more. We need to see everything!’ Really positive reactions from them, too. I feel like they knew that looked like me more than what I had before, ya know?

Paloma received positive feedback from her closest friends whose reactions were completely opposite of her parents:

All of my close girl friends were so ... they were like, "You look beautiful! You're amazing!" A lot of my friends were super like, ‘OMG, that's so badass.’ That was interesting. All my close friends were really supportive. If they weren't, even if they were like, ‘You don't look your best,’ they were very supportive of the act.

One interesting topic that emerged were compliments asking participants if they were models. It is fairly common knowledge that models are photo shopped almost beyond recognition, their hair perfectly coiffed and bodies perfectly slender. There’s a level of realness because the model is a physical person, but they also contribute to unattainable expectations. Extremely short hair causes women to stand out. Short hair paired with the unfeasible expectations of modeling created a commonplace compliment. A modeling experience happened to Nikita only after she buzzed her hair off: “One of the girls that I was living with friggin loved it. She really loves taking photographs and model photos and stuff like that so I was her shoe-in model for months.”

Alex, with her short, platinum pixie cut is asked almost on a daily basis whether she models: "I feel like I get more modeling compliments. More edgy compliments like you should do this [model]. Oh do you do this?" She is also told that she looks like DJ and actress Ruby Rose (and she does!) Hazel is also no stranger to modeling compliments, although unlike the others she actually does do some modeling on the side:

I also get people asking me if I'm a model. So either I have cancer or I'm a model.

Really, either one ... but yeah, I've gotten that too. That somehow it's not a real ... that it's like a...you know what I mean? That models are such a supernatural thing.

It is interesting that Hazel mentions that models are supernatural when Isabel has actually been told that she is reminiscent of ethereal beings, “People call me, they say I look like a pixie or like a fairy. I've gotten fairy a lot.”

Strangers tend to give plenty of positive compliments as well. Roxy said that her hair is a conversation starter:

People in the elevator. People in the airport. I've always had a cute haircut, especially because my dad's wife would cut it when it was in a bob. And it's always very cute and I have thick hair that's always very nice - I'm very lucky about that. I've always had people comment about my hair but the short hair and the striking platinum blonde or shaved sides ... I have people I don't even know come up to me and they're like, ‘Oh my gosh, it's so cute!’ Or, ‘You're so brave.’ Or, ‘That's so great!’ I'm like, ‘I didn't do it for that, but thank you!’ It's a conversation starter and that's kind of ... I think that's fun.

For others, people will randomly yell out compliments. In our interview Sam had received a compliment that day, "Just today I was walking down the street and this women on a bike said, ‘I really like your hair.’" Isabel has also experienced this: "Just random compliments. Like that never used to happen to me before. Just like walking out of Kroger, you know. Someone just yells over – ‘I love your hair!’"

Women tend to be very positive of participants’ short hairstyles and tend to give the most compliments. Fiona has had many women give her compliments on her hair:

Compliments have always been like, 'OMG that's so cute. I wish I could do that.'" That's the thing I hear the most. 'I wish I was brave enough to do that.'" I always respond with, 'Do it. You'll feel amazing.'

A lot of compliments had to deal with bravery. It seems to be a trend that women find short hair on other women as an act of bravery. Both Nikita and Kirsten received these types of compliments:

It's like a certain confidence. Like everybody ... 'Whoah, you're so brave for cutting your hair.' That's sort of vain to say but ... I don't know. It sort of resonates with you when people tell you that you're brave enough. You're like, 'Yeah, I'm a badass.' You know.

Kirsten was indirectly told she was brave,

"Even when people compliment me on my hair they say things like, "Oh, I love your hair, but I'm not brave enough to do that."

Although Shweta, was met with positivity among her friends, she was met with even more compliments online. She ended up doing a photo shoot with a friend and went viral on the social media site Tumblr:

I was just like caught by this community that was like, 'You look fucking rad!' and I was like 'thank you!' Like, so. I don't know. I was met with more positivity than I ever have as far as like body positivity goes so.

Helena believes she gets compliments because her hair makes her stand out and she always makes sure to get a quality cut:

Like, I get compliments a lot. I think it's because the hair's a little different. It's really well done, like I always really care about the quality of the haircut I get, because I don't do a lot of other stuff. I don't like wearing make up or wearing a ton of jewelry or things like

that. And it just makes you feel good. It's not the idea that you need a compliment, but when you get one you're kind of like Yeah! I do feel baller today! Thank you for noticing.

Sense of Community (positive). A subculture is defined as “a cultural group within a culture that differs in one or more ways from that culture” (*Your Dictionary*, 2016). The literature review has already discussed how short haired women make up a very small percentage of millennial American women due to the overwhelming effects of societal beauty norms. With this previous knowledge, as I began to interview my participants it emerged that they feel a sense of community with other short haired women. Because it fits the previous definition, I believe short haired women would constitute as its own subculture. Isabel makes this statement more relevant:

I guess I feel like a little camaraderie, almost like we're in the same club. Like, hey, we got short hair. Like, I know that's kinda weird, but I do. It's kinda like people who drive a Jeep like, the Jeep thing kinda like the short hair thing.

Isabel was not the only woman to make this comparison; Kirsten also compared the concept to “people who drive Jeeps.”

I think they have that with motorcyclists and people who drive Jeeps have or are supposed to have a community, women with short hair, it's just kinda a thing, I guess,” she continued, “As another women with short hair. I love it. I think, I dunno if I've really, I mean, unless their hair is really, way weird, but generally I like it. It still appeals to me when I see it on other women. And it's funny, when I worked at TJ Maxx and I was a cashier and I would see women with short hair or pixie cuts would come through the line

and I'd be like, 'Oh, I like your hair!' and she'd be like, 'Oh, well I was about to say the same thing to you,' you know, it's just almost like a little community.

More than half of the women I interviewed said the same types of things. Before I even asked her how she viewed other women with short hair Helena revealed to me how she felt, "I feel like women with short hair like other women's short hair, like will constantly notice each other's short hair. And then like, 'your short hair is also really cool.'"

Nikita noted that in the graphic design field where she works there are many women with short hair and for her it is seen as a level of respect:

I've always respected women with short hair. Even in artistic communities and stuff like that - I am an artist - in artistic communities I feel it's just a level of even greater respect.

You're just like, 'Yeah. You're a badass. You're brave. You have life figured out. You are confident.' I don't know. I always just looked up to them. It's cool to be among the ranks, I guess.

There was also mention of admiration or jealousy for other women's short hairstyles. Isabel revealed to me that she felt a twinge of jealousy for short hair before she decided to cut her hair short herself. "I think I might maybe was kind've jealous of their bravery almost. You know, growing up in the south, it's like, you don't cut your hair short til you're like old." Abigail was another woman who fell into this subcategory:

Before it was always kind of admiration or it would remind me that I wanted to do it.

And I'd see how it looked on them. And after, it was kind of cool. I felt like I was in a Short Hair Club. I feel like I noticed it more. You know when you buy a car and you notice every other car that looks the same?

This sense of jealousy for women with short hair was true for myself. I would spend a lot of my time looking online at pictures of women with short hair, reading articles about women who had buzzed their hair, talking to people who had decided to go short – I wanted that for myself, but I let fear of the unknown rule for years before I finally decided it was time to do what I always wanted to do.

Sam, like Abigail said that she felt like she fit into a club:

I don't know. Maybe a little more ... I don't know. Like I'm in a club a little more? I don't know. Like, 'Yeah, you went there and I went there.' Or I have more respect for them or something. Maybe that would be one thing that might have changed a little bit. 'You went for it. I went for it. We're friends.' I think that's probably the one thing.

Fiona was very enthusiastic when discussing how she felt about seeing other women with short hair:

When I see another woman with short hair, usually I'm like, 'Hey! You figured it out too!' Very much a sense of sorority, I guess you could say. 'She knows what I feel like!' Or a lot of the times I'll look at what they're doing. 'What'chu got going on? Do you like it? Is it easy to manage? Could I do that? Would that work for me?' Cause if it's something I could do fairly easily...I get excited. It makes me happy to see a woman with short hair.

Kelly just wanted women to feel beautiful in whatever hairstyle they chose, a body positive approach, loving yourself no matter what.

I love it [short hair]. I feel like it shouldn't matter if you have long hair or short hair. If you, you can tell if someone like loves themselves, you know what I mean. They feel good, they look good that day or their hair looks great or whatever. And like if they're

confident and happy in what they're wearing and how they're styling their hair then I'm like yeah, you go. You live your best life. And so I think it's cool when women have really short hair. Just cause there's stereotypes involved with having short hair.

Shweta said that her short hair connected her to other short haired women but also to a more feminist community:

They make me happy. Like it feels like community. Just like when I see anybody that's like like me I'm like, that's going out of the norm. I'm like yeah, you know like stick it to the man. Do it!

The fact that multiple women were saying the same types of words like “community,” “sense of sorority,” “like I’m in a short hair club,” is enough to infer that there is a sense of a subculture where they recognize, accept and compliment other women who are like them in choice of hairstyle. Because the response is positive and common they therefore have a place where they feel like they belong.

Intimidating (negative & positive). A study presented by Dr. Albert Mannes from the University of Pennsylvania involved three experiments to study the perception of men with shaved heads. These men were deemed as powerful and intimidating (The Body Odd, 2012). According to my findings, I believe this concept also reflects how these women with short hair are viewed. About half of the women in my study mentioned that they perceived others to be intimidated by them or were told that they were intimidating. Alex, a recognized You-tuber who vlogs (video blogs) with her girlfriend Jessica almost every day said this:

I also noticed people don't approach me as much...and I think that's because before I looked more like I dunno little girl...I just feel like I've noticed people definitely don't approach me as much. People approach Jessica. Just like some guy would just come up to

me and start talking about life and I'm like "okay" and that hasn't happened to me since I cut my hair.

The attention she received changed drastically once she cut her hair. Fiona, who has involved herself in male-dominated fields said that she is used to hearing people say that she is intimidating even if she does not want to be seen in that way:

That is probably one of the first comments I hear from other people, especially when I was marching [band] or when I'm weight-lifting. I've been in the gym and had girls come to me and be like, 'I wanted to talk to you but I was too intimidated.' Or I'd have girls come up to me at shows and they'd be like, 'Oh my gosh, I wanted to talk to you but I was too intimidated.'

Fiona and Alex both mentioned that they didn't want to be seen as intimidating by their peers or strangers and deemed this was a negative trait associated with their short hair. Hazel on the other hand sees intimidation as a good thing, especially in her field of opera:

I think I've always been intimidating because I've always been tall and I'd rather be intimidating than be looked over," she continued about her Master's degree, "I remember when I came to grad school last year. They were like, "Who's that chick with the fucking cool hair?" And I was like, "that's me." And they were afraid to talk to me. A lot of people were afraid to talk, which I think is interesting.

When asked how she thought other people viewed her short hair, Roxy also thought that people found her intimidating, but that she felt it was not due only to her hair.

I think some people think it's intimidating. I've also been told that I'm intimidating no matter what my hair looks like. That's a totally different topic. I think some people view it as, kind of like I do - a bad-ass move to cut your hair short. I think it's very freeing.

The idea of “bad-assery” was a common thread woven among these stories about intimidation. Many of these women felt that they looked badass and believed that others thought the same about them. The term is strongly associated with intimidation. The dictionary definition even includes the word intimidating saying that a badass is someone who is “distinctively tough or powerful; so exceptional as to be intimidating (Dictionary.com, 2016). It was interesting to me to see that “badass” was mostly seen in a positive light whereas “intimidating” was seen as negative, yet both are essentially one in the same.

Stereotypes (negative). Many of the women recognized the stereotypes, which surround women with short hair, for instance short hair on women is strongly associated with signs of age, illness, and punishment (Koppelman, 1996). Hazel was annoyed by this fact saying,

If men shave their head, who the fuck cares? No one cares. But if a woman shaves their head, she either has cancer or she went through a breakup. I either have to be on my deathbed or heartbroken to get a sweet haircut?

Nikita cut her hair and experienced this first hand,

At the beginning, since it was all gone, there were a few people who didn't know who asked me if I was sick or if I was okay. Plus it was the middle of the winter. Plus right after I shaved it, probably a month after I shaved it, I got mono. People were just like, ‘Are you?...What’s up, man?’

So she did end up getting sick, but it had nothing to do with her hair, which is the problem with stereotypes. Stereotypes are in place because many people fit within its borders, yet women with short hair by choice are often misrepresented by these stereotypes, such as the one mentioned above. Still, the biggest stereotype with short hair is that it automatically labels a woman as a lesbian. Several participants, myself included, received sideways comments or were wrongly

mistaken as some form of queer. In an article entitled, “*7 Things Women with Short Hair Are Tired of Hearing*,” the number one placeholder is “Are you gay?” (Bianco, 2014).

Maya is a straight female who is actively involved in roller derby, a tough, no-nonsense sport that involves roller-skating while pushing and shoving to keep opponents at bay. Her short hair and activities have given off the “gay” vibe to some,

Strangers, I have had some judgment on it. Like, one time when I was in Macon, someone came up to and was like, ‘Are you a lesbian? You have short hair, you play roller derby, I mean you obviously must be.’ I was like nope, I’m not.

For the women that consider themselves to be more conservative, the thought of being mistaken as gay was very disconcerting, like Quinn, for instance:

Well, a couple of times if I went out with my friends downtown, women would hit on me and it kinda concerned me. Like if you choose to be - want to be - feel you are gay, that’s your... between you and the Lord. But it bothered me that people thought that that’s what I had chosen.

Roxy, although she did never experienced negative comments from strangers, read a similar article to the previous comment and was worried about what she might experience:

I had a struggle with myself because I’m like, ‘Okay, well, does this mean I’m going to be taken seriously? Does this mean people are going to think I’m NOT straight’ but then again, I never thought that when I was a kid. That never came into question when I was a kid. But yet I’ve been hit on by a woman and I’m like, ‘Was it my hair? What the hell?’

From what I could infer from both my participants and myself, short hair is obviously still a stereotypical indicator of homosexuality even though the term “butch” came about in the 1890s (Gibson & Meem, 2002). It was also revealed that the older generation seems to have a larger

problem with hair looking masculine, which for them often translates to looking homosexual. I was personally told that my hair looked dyke-y by an older, unnamed family member. Spencer's mother seemed to be concerned about the appearance short hair gives off as well,

Before I got a pixie, though, my mom was, like, all worried because she's ridiculous and was like, 'Just make sure it doesn't come out looking like a butch lesbian.' And I was like, 'MOTHER,' because she's usually not like ... I don't know.

Other women were mislabeled when they were seen out with other friends with short hair. Nikita who is happily in a relationship with a man has been lumped into this stereotype.

I've been mistaken a couple of times ... me and my other friend with really short hair - it's probably about as long as mine is right now - I've been mistaken as a lesbian several times. It's not like that bothers us - we usually just go with it until they go away - but yeah, at bars especially. Now that I'm thinking of it, there were a couple of times this summer, too.

Paloma also experienced this when she was with one of her friends:

When I cut my hair ... this is really funny ... one of my closest friends, we were always together. People we had just sort of met and we spent a lot of time together and she would introduce me to all of her friends, who eventually became my friends, and people would automatically just sort of assume we were dating. That was something I hadn't ever gotten. I'd ask people about it and they're like, 'You guys are just close.' I'm like, 'Is it really that?' And they're like, 'And you have really short hair.' People would automatically pin me, even in the circles that I kind of ran in that were really progressive and forward-thinking, people would always be like, 'Well, you and this girl are so close and you're always together and you kind of have short hair, so are you guys together?'

Fiona was another woman that was wrongly labeled as gay, which she attributes to the small mindedness of the South:

I was interacting with a group of friends and there was someone that they were friends with that I hadn't met with and he was like, 'Oh, I heard that there was a lesbian that's part of this group. It's so nice to meet you.' I was like, oddly offended but I didn't know why. 'That's not me!' That's one of the things like, even in the South, people are like, 'Oh, she's gay!' She continued on to say, "I don't like people assuming things about my identity and it's ridiculous to me that my hair is such a huge signifier of my identity to other people, even though on the same sign of that coin it is a huge identifier for me.

The problem was that even though her hair is an identifier, it is not an identifier of her sexuality. Hazel maintains a blog, Instagram and Tumblr and in doing so has maintained a very strong online presence for many years. She talked about how both she and her fiancé's (both straight) pictures have been re-blogged onto gay websites on multiple occasions:

I messaged one of them once because they took a picture of mine and just put it up. I just mentioned to them, 'Yo, that's cool, but just so your viewers know, I'm a straight woman. Maybe you shouldn't be putting that on this really intensely lesbian website.'

The fact that she was on the website did not bother her, it was the fact that the website was essentially telling a lie by including a woman who does not identify as queer.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, many of the women who did identify as lesbian or queer felt that their haircut made it more obvious to the average person that they do identify in this way, so you could understand how this stereotype would be frustrating for straight women. Shweta's haircut for instance had a lot to do with her gender dysphoria and sexuality,

I dunno, probably also people look at me and they're like 'oh, she's gay.' You know?

laughs I think maybe that's another reason why men have hit on me less since I've had short hair. Cause they're like, there's not an invitation of like straightness.

Here, Shweta implies what many of the articles out there have said about men not liking short hair because it appears too masculine and doesn't look sexy (Sonofra, 2014; Sterling, 2014). She also mentioned how she applauds her cis-gender, straight friends more if they have short hair because, "you're doing something that is definitely like against the culture that you're in and like the dating scene that you're in." There is obviously the short hair = queer stereotype at play (Bianco, 2014).

Mae also feels that her sexual orientation (bisexuality) is more on display, "I feel like my hair sorta does 'out' me. Like, in terms of my sexual orientation. People tend to not assume that I'm straight." This didn't really bother personally, but she did say that some people give snide remarks dealing with her sexuality. Sam mentioned that her inspiration for short hair came from her gay friends and recognized that short hair is a popular hairstyle amongst them:

This is funny, but you know, a lot of lesbians have short hair. I have a lot of lesbian friends and they all looked so cute with their short hair. So if anything, that would probably be my inspiration - my gays friends that have cute little hairdos.

Alex was the odd queer person of the group, she agreed with the others generally speaking, but had more to add, "It also, I guess you could also say it fits under the lesbian section. Short hair you know with your sexuality. Except, I never ever...before I even knew that I was lesbian I wanted to cut it."

Alex felt that it was important to note that it frustrated her when people said that she cut her hair because she was gay. She emphasized that she cut her hair because she *wanted* to cut her hair and that it was her choice and had nothing to do with her sexuality.

Although stereotypes can be true about some people, and on some level maybe even most people, in the case of these women with short hair, the stereotype proved to be false and not an indicator of sexual orientation in over three quarters of the participants interviewed. The fact that so many of the women were wrongly mistaken illustrates that attitudes about this stereotype need to change. Many of the women did not view the being gay part as something negative, but it did bother them that people made a significant assumption about their identity, usually without even knowing them.

How Short Hair Relates to Identity and Self Confidence

Self confidence (positive). In her interview with *Red*, psychologist Elaine Slater talked about the importance of hair. In its relation to confidence, she stated, “Many associate confidence with feeling in control, and hair is one way that most of use can be in charge in terms of the vast number of ways in which we can alter it” (Lewis, 2015, para. 6). In the case of these women, all said that their short hair has maintained or increased their confidence. These women also perceived that their hair is seen as confident to outsiders as well as is the case with Quinn, Maya and Isabel.

Quinn declared that her confidence “went through the roof,” and that she viewed herself as a “head turner” with men. Maya mentioned that she was already confident, but that others noticed. “I am an overly confident person. I have always been that way and maybe it [the short hair] portrays it to everyone else.” Isabel did not describe herself as a very confident person, but

she does believe that her hair makes it seem as though she does based on how she views other women with short hair:

I don't know cause I feel like a lot of girls with super short hair have more confident personalities than I do. So I feel like maybe I like masquerade as like this super confident person, cause I think they are and I'm super not.

Even though Isabel felt as though she was not confident, she did say that her hair increases her confidence, "I guess I do now perhaps kinda of pull my head a little bit higher. It's given me a little bit more confidence. It gives me a little bit more pep in my step." Hazel talked about the fact that she has good and bad days with body image, but her hair and her clothing are things she truly loves about herself. She believes that even when she's not feeling her most confident, she still looks like she is confident and that is extremely powerful.

Mae felt more confident with her short hair because it makes her feel more like herself. She recounted a story about getting her haircut and her mother insisting the stylist keep it longer, she told me about the excitement she felt after she cut it super short like she wanted and that excitement pours into what she said:

I feel more self-confident now with short hair. Just because it feels more 'me'. I mean, when I had long hair I was always sort of messing with it and trying to figure out ... looking for split ends and worrying about it and now it's all gone. You just have fun.

Nikita decided that she would own her shorn haircut. She said that she used to hide behind her long hair but that wearing a buzz cut gave her more confidence:

I own this. This is mine. This is my head, my hair, and my decision. It's what I wanted, 'so yay hitting goals.' And I know it went to a really good cause, so whenever I think of my hair now, my haircuts, it makes me hold myself a little bit better, you know?

Hearing multiple women declare their rise in self-confidence was really remarkable. I wouldn't say it was news to me, it was something I expected, mainly because I know that I personally felt the most confident with short hair and had a strong feeling that others would feel the same. People noticed me, looked at me and asked me questions about my hair. Short hair on women is projected as confident (Seico, 2015) and I think there is confirmation of this idea. Rocking my buzz cut was one of the most powerful times in my life. I felt new, different and extremely confident with nothing to hide behind. These women also understood that feeling. Paloma, like Nikita, also chose to buzz her hair off, but she mentioned that it took some getting used to: "You don't have a part anymore, you don't have bangs ... you look really different. I think after I got used to it, it really boosted my confidence." Abigail's buzz cut also took some getting used to, but after she received positive feedback her confidence grew:

At first, I was still unsure of it because I feel like a lot of the things that I do I have to have ... it's really hard for me to make a decision and feel good about something without others' approval of it. But after I had gotten a good response, it made me feel really confident. I just really like it. I felt like it displayed who I was.

Sam was terrified to cut off her dreads because it became what she was known for. I asked to interview her just a few weeks after she had cut her hair. She told me that after she took the plunge and cut it off that she thought she would not get the types of compliments she received with dreadlocks, but she said that the compliments have not stopped. She loves the versatility of her short hair and the fact that her wife loves it and of course, that it makes her more self-assured.

It makes me feel a little more confident, you know? Yeah. It's funny because I feel like it really does ... it could be professional and also be kind of daring. It's just interesting. I kind of like that.

Hair has the ability to both decrease and increase confidence because it defines us (Smith, 2015). For these women their short hair increases their confidence, they let their hair define them in a positive way. For me, my short hair is usually when I'm at my most confident. I feel the most strong and ready to take on the world. From what I can conclude from my participants, they tend to have the same positive mindset. Their hair is a choice for them, it makes them who they are and their look paired with their choice makes them confident.

Identity/It's Me (positive). Identity outside of sexual identity is an important topic because hair represents a strong part of a person's identity (Whitbourne, 2015). The participants confirmed this to me after many discussed how their short hair is a reflection of who they feel they are. Countless participants explained to me why their hair is an accurate representation of self.

Helena told me how she felt:

Long hair is uncomfortable to me. I don't like it, I don't like the way it feels or the way it looks um, I dressed for a lot of years and wore men's style fashion and so like it just didn't look right to me either, so, I guess that's...mostly it.

Mae also did not feel that long hair was the image she wanted to project, "I didn't really feel comfortable with long hair. I didn't feel like it was, I guess, authentic to myself. So when I cut my hair short it just felt right."

Alex was another woman that said that she felt awkward in her own skin with long hair:

So like, I just feel confident in my own skin. Before I just felt awkward and like everyone else. And with my short hair I just feel like much more me. Like people say that all the

time and I agree, it's totally me. I, I dunno, it just. I'm me! For the most part yeah, it just allows me to feel more me.

Other women liked their hairstyle because it allows them to play with their identity. They don't have to fit one certain mold all the time. Roxy considers herself to be creative and her hair is a reflection of that artistic side:

I would say it's just a creative outlet. I love ... it's part of what I ... my hair, my makeup I feel is something that I just ... it's fun. It's something that ... I don't know. When I have a bad day I'm like, 'At least my hair looks good...It's just another creative outlet and it's something fun, something small that I know makes me walk a little taller some days.

Sam likes that she is not bound to one facet of her identity:

I feel like with short hair, as far as it identifying me, it's a little bit more loose. It can kind of go across the spectrum of it being identified as like, my identity as a professional. Or it can also be my identity as being with a woman. Or being a little hip. It's kind of cool because I feel it can fit into a lot of different identities, which I kind of enjoy.

Fiona is similar in the fact that she says that she likes to play with her identity a lot, her short hair gives her opportunity to play with ambiguity. She says that her hair has, "always been a thing about having control of self-expression and the appearance of identity, like unique identity and strength." For Hazel, her short haired identity went back to her confidence,

I know I have life in me every day. Maybe hair has something to do with it because it's blond, shiny, always perky and happy. It's never drab. It's never just a curtain on my face. And no matter what, I think my identity ... you always see my face. Always. Any way I turn at this point in time, you can see my face.

She emphasized that there is no way to hide, her hair and thus her identity is on display. Kelly reflected on the past and how that affects her today:

Looking back, it was the first step in 'this is part of my identity of having short hair' and figuring out that's who I wanted to be as a person. Looking back I'm like yeah, that was kind've a cool decision that I made when I was nineteen.

Three of the women who have only ever worn pixie cuts believed that although their hair plays a role in their identity, it is not their entire identity. They all revealed to me that they don't think they would lose their identity if they lost their hair. Both Maya and Roxy felt this way, as did Quinn who views her hair as a way to express herself,

I'm not my hair. I could be bald and still be straight, Bible-believing southern girl, sassy as hell. It doesn't matter. I've had my hair all kinds of different colors, too. I don't know, it's just fun to express yourself through your hair.

Overall, hair was seen as an opportunity to express oneself, it is a blank canvas and figuratively these women choose to paint it in their self-expression every day. Their hair allows them the opportunity to create and re-create their identity (Lowe, 2016).

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

The following major themes, viewed through both a positive and negative lens, emerged after interviewing eighteen women with short hair in the summer of 2016.

1. To discover what motivates women to cut their hair extremely short.

Change was the most motivating factor for these millennial women to cut their hair short. It emerged that many different circumstances compelled them to cut their hair short from weight loss to break ups (positive and negative). Other women chose to cut their hair short because it was what they wanted and most represented how they viewed themselves (positive). Although even if it was what they wanted and this made them happy, many people asked them why they would do such a thing (negative). Lastly, some of the women chose to cut their hair short due to management, they thought their hair was either too thick or too thin to look or feel “good” long (negative).

2. To discover how women view themselves with short hair.

The Millennial women with short hair who interviewed for this study, perceive themselves as strong and confident individuals, all claiming that their hairstyle makes them feel “confident,” “empowered,” “brave,” or “badass” (positive). For these women, cutting their hair short was found to be addictive due to the way their short hair made them look and feel (positive).

3. To reveal how women with short hair perceive others views of their short hair.

These women believed that most people liked their short hair. Friends and random strangers were the most likely candidates to give these women compliments on their short haircuts (positive). These women also stated that they felt a sense of community with other women who had short hairstyles, from which they received recognition for their similar hairstyles such as a head nod or a compliment (positive). On the other hand, family members were the most likely to give these women troubles about their choice of haircut. Most of the parents in particular were not fond of their daughter's decisions to cut their hair extremely short (negative). Almost all of the women both queer and straight were pegged as a lesbian at least once. The women who identify as lesbians did not want people to assume them as gay based solely on their haircut, although they believed that people do view them in that way. It was revealed that not one of the self-identified queer women cut their hair to be better perceived as queer (negative). The straight women were more disappointed that people were so narrow minded to assume something about their identity without even knowing them (negative). Many of the women also believed or were told by others that their short hair made them seem intimidating, although some liked the idea that they were intimidating, most claimed they were personable people and did not want people to think they were unapproachable (positive and negative).

4. To discover how short hair relates to identity and self-confidence.

All participants stated that their short haircut increased their confidence and made them stand out in a crowd (positive). A plethora of these women also said that short hair represented the truest version of themselves stating words along the lines of, “It’s me” or “who I am” (positive). In terms of sexual identity most women did not want to be assumed to be queer based solely on their hairstyle, even some that did identify as lesbian or bi-sexual (negative). Lastly, the women of Latina and Indian descent tended to experience more negativity culturally from their hairstyle choices due to cultural norm differences (negative).

This attempt to study the motivations and inspirations of women with short hair within the millennial age group was largely successful. Even though transferability to the general population of women with short hair cannot be reached, there was still enough information to develop strong themes within this group of eighteen women. Ultimately, my research informed readers about the society in which we live. If this study was performed with more participants, taking thousands of women over a longer period of time, or if it focused more on one specific region of the United States there may have been a case for more transferability. I believe that my story intermixed with these womens’ stories helps to understand a small part of a bigger story.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study was dedicated to revealing the motivations, perceptions, identity and self-confidence of millennial women with short hair. Although there were women of different ethnicities included in this study, the majority were Caucasian. It would enhance the study if more women of color were interviewed, including Asian women outside of Indian-Asian descent.

Another area of further study would be to study women outside the millennial age group. I ended up meeting a woman who I assumed to be within my age range, but when she came in for the interview I found out that she was older than my age cohort. I chose to proceed with the interview, even though I could not use her data within my study. After comparing her interview to the others, many of her answers mirrored those of the younger millennial women. It would be an investment to determine if the same objective trends continued for short haired women of Generation X or the baby boomers. Within the theme of stereotypes, it was revealed that short hair on young women is associated with lesbianism, yet older women often wear their hair short and are less likely to be viewed in this way. Scholarly research could provide more information on why this is.

Although some research has been done on women who have not made the personal choice to cut their hair short due to chemotherapy, alopecia or other illness, it would be of academic interest to interview women who didn't have a choice and compare their confidence and self perception with women who did make the personal choice to cut their hair short. Another interesting theme that emerged from this thesis was the idea of cutting one's hair for charity purposes – a few of my participants had participated in “Locks of Love” and one in “St. Baldricks,” these charities encourage the giving of hair to make wigs for children and encouraged shaving your head to raise money for children's cancer research, respectively.

Finally, one could mirror this study, but use men with long hair to determine if their experiences are in any way relatable to the women with short hair who stray from the norm of long hair American beauty ideals. Are men with long hair more accepted than women with short hair?

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APPENDICES

CONSENT FORM

**UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
CONSENT FORM**

I Am Not My Hair – or Am I?

The Personal Choice of Women with Short Hair: An Autoethnography

Researcher's Statement

I am asking you to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This form is designed to give you the information about the study so you can decide whether to be in the study or not. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called “informed consent.” A copy of this form will be given to you.

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Co-Investigator: *Paige Wear*
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Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to uncover the inspirations, motivations and influences guiding millennial women aged 18-35's decisions to shave, buzz, or cut their hair very short.

Study Procedures

If you agree to participate in this study...

- You will be asked to answer a set of interview questions
- The total duration of the interview should last no more than 1.5 hours
- You may be asked for a second interview if the researcher needs to ask more questions or needs clarification to an answer
- Procedure is as follows:
 - Participant will receive invitation via in-person, the web or social media to participate in study from researcher to see if they meet the criteria.
 - If they respond, meet the criteria, and are interested in participating, participant will receive consent form.
 - After reading the consent form participant will accept or decline participation.

- If participation is accepted, participant will send consent form back to researcher with electronic signature attached.
- Participant will agree on a time to meet for first interviews between the months of June 2016-August 2016.
- Participant will participate in first interview either in person or via Skype.
- Participant may be asked to provide a picture of their hair.
- Participant may be interviewed again (if necessary) sometime between May 2016 and October 2016. This second interview will last between 30 to 45 minutes.
- After second interview participant will be finished with study participation.
- Participants will be interviewed about their hair, including: experiences with their short hair and perceptions about their short hair, and their personal identity.
- You may be asked to share a personal photograph to be included in the thesis, but this is not required. If you are uncomfortable with your face being shown, your face can be blurred in Photoshop.
- All interviews will be audio-recorded only with your permission.
- First round interviews will take place between June 2016 and August 2016, Second round interviews will take place between June 2016 and October 2016.

Risks and discomforts

- We do not anticipate any risks higher than what you would experience in normal day to day living from participating in this research
- Pseudonyms will be given to every participant in order to minimize the risk of being identified
- Because pictures will be used, there is potential for breach of confidentiality, which may result in discomfort if someone you know personally reads this paper and recognizes you or your hairstyle

Benefits

- Benefits include helping to aid in further research in women's empowerment and positivity
- Other benefits include gaining more or better awareness about self and identity
- This research may lead to finding the motivations and perceptions of women with short hair and how this relates to self and identity.

Incentives for participation

If participant is meeting the researcher in person they may receive a small coffee during the interview.

Audio/Video Recording

All interviews will be audio recorded. Transcriptions of these recordings will help aid the researcher in later analyzing the collected data. After completion of the research, audio recordings will be kept indefinitely, but will be locked away in a password protected computer.

Please provide initials below if you agree to have this interview audio recorded or not.

_____ I do not want to have this interview recorded.

_____ I am willing to have this interview recorded.

Pictures may be published within the final thesis, but images may also be used in activities beyond research analysis (i.e. publications and/or academic presentations).

Please provide initials below if you agree to your image being used, not used or used if your face is blurred.

_____ I am willing to have my image used

_____ I am NOT willing to have my image used

_____ I am willing to have my image used only if my face is blurred

Privacy/Confidentiality

Data collection will only involve information that identifies you directly if you allow yourself to be photographed with your face shown. Interview data will be recorded but privacy and confidentiality will be maintained through the use of pseudonyms. Recordings of your interview answers will only be used for research analyzing purposes. Identifiable data such as names and e-mail addresses will be stored on the researcher's password protected computer. Only myself and my Major Professor (Dr. Patricia Hunt-Hurst) and possibly a transcriptionist will have access to the interview recordings. The project's research records may also be reviewed by departments at the University of Georgia responsible for regulatory and research oversight.

Researchers will not release identifiable results of the study to anyone other than individuals working on the project without your written consent unless required by law.

Taking part is voluntary

Your involvement in this study is completely voluntary. You may refuse to participate, and you may discontinue at any time, with no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

If you decide to stop or withdraw from the study, the information/data collected from or about you up to the point of your withdrawal will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed.

If you have questions

The main researcher conducting this study is Paige Wear a graduate student at the University of Georgia. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact her at paigenwear@gmail.com or reach her by telephone at 563-468-8362. You may also contact Dr. Patricia Hunt-Hurst at phunt@uga.edu or (706-542-4888). If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706.542.3199 or irb@uga.edu.

Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research:

To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. Your signature below indicates that you have read or had read to you this entire consent form, and have had all of your questions answered.

Name of Researcher

Signature

Date

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

INTERVIEW GUIDE

1) **Discover what motivates women to cut their hair extremely short.**

Tell me about your hair and how you have worn it over the past five years.
Describe your hair before the initial cut.

Why did you first decide to buzz/shave/cut your hair short?

Describe your first experience with cutting your hair short.

Where did you find inspiration for cutting your hair?

What do you like the most about having short hair?

2) **Discover how women perceive themselves with short hair.**

Please describe for me how you felt after your first short haircut?

How does your short hair make you feel now?

How do you view other women with short hair? Before the cut? After the cut?

3) **Reveal how women with short hair believe others view their short hair and to recount experiences with their short hair.**

How do you think others perceive your short hair?

What types of compliments and criticisms have you received?

Describe to me experiences that you've had that revolve around your short hair.

If you have a significant other, tell me about the reaction you received when you first cut your hair? Family? Close friends?

4) To discover how hair relates to identity and self-confidence?

Tell me what your hairstyle says about you?

What role does your hair play into your identity?

How does your hairstyle affect your self-confidence?

SAMPLE INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Paige: Okay, we're recording. Alright, so first I have to ask you know the boring demographic questions. But how old are you?

Isabel: Thirty-three.

Paige: And where are you from?

Isabel: Macon, GA originally, but I live here.

Paige: Sexual orientation?

Isabel: Straight *laughs*

Paige: And ethnicity, obvious.

Isabel: White.

Paige: Occupation?

Isabel: I'm a teacher.

Paige: Alright, so, first question, um, tell me about your hair and how you've worn it over the past five years?

Isabel: Five years, um, it's pretty much been like this for the past five years. Yeah, I think so. I went a little longer, probably about five years and I didn't like it and I cut it back off short.

Paige: And how was your hair before you cut it short? Did you ever have it really long or?

Isabel: Yes. It was always like this length, long, straight. Um, I uh, think one time in college I went up to like here (motions to chin) about chin length and then I grew it back out.

Paige: Why did you first decide to cut your hair short?

Um, well, I did it right after I got married um and I guess I thought I needed a change Isabel:

Um, I, my hair is very fine and so I never really ever was able to do anything with it anyway. My mom's a big tomboy and so she never like taught me how to do hair or anything like that.

Paige: Yeah.

Isabel: So um, I asked my husband and said you know, I'm thinking about cutting my hair really short. And he said um, well you always just have it up in a bun anyway, so I mean, why not?

Paige: Do it.

Isabel: *laughs*

Paige: Describe your first experience with cutting your hair short.

Isabel: Um, it wasn't very good. I think that the stylist sensed my nervousness because I went in with hair you know down here (motions to past breasts).

Paige: And you were gonna go full pixie.

Isabel: Yeah, I wanted pixie. And I dunno if she sensed my hesitation or she didn't believe me that I really wanted this. And so I kinda had this in between like um, it was almost like Ellen DeGeneres but like further back but she had kinda the ...(motions hairstyle)

Paige: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Isabel: And so I, you know I caught my reflection coming out in a store front and was just, this is not what I want. I freaked out, I cried. That's probably the last time I've ever cried about a haircut. And uh, and then I um, about a week later I made another appointment at a different place and I said. Chop. It. Off. Like THIS. And she did it and then I liked it. *laughs*

Paige: Where did you find inspiration for cutting your hair short?

Isabel: Um, there weren't, it wasn't, I did it in 2007, so there weren't, it wasn't really popular yet. You know and now I feel like it's everywhere.

Paige: Yeah.

Isabel: Um, so actually I think I did a couple of Google image searches and uh, actually uh, what's her name. Natalie Portman, V for Vendetta, she had shaved it all off.

Paige: Yeah.

Isabel: And I thought that she looked really cool.

Paige: Yeah when it grew out, it totally looks like yours!

Isabel: Yeah. I found a Google image of her and I was like, "I like that."

Paige: Her hair grew out like fantastic.

Isabel: It did.

Paige: Mine did not grow out that nicely when I buzzed it. Um, what do you like most about having short hair?

Isabel: Um, I like that it's not like typical, I guess. That, you know, that it's just a little different. Not like your average chick look. I would say that it's lower maintenance, but I don't really know I can't really say for sure if it is, because I know, I still have to like, I can't get away with just throwing it in a ponytail and putting a headband anymore. That like doesn't really work.

Paige: Yeah.

Isabel: Ooh. There's lightning. Yeesh!

Paige: That happened to me on my way here. It was like really close. And it's like gosh.

thunder rumbles

Paige: Ohp. There it is.

Isabel: There it is.

Paige: Um, how did you feel? I guess you touched on this a little bit, but how did you feel after your first short haircut? You can tell me your not so great experience and then the last one.

Isabel: The first one that was not so great it was longer. I actually felt like a boy. I felt like a little school boy. You know and I did not like it at all. I didn't think I made a mistake I just I just knew it wasn't right. And so, but then the second time when I got it really super short it took a long time to get used to it um, I just kept on like rubbing my head, you know. Um, but I really really liked it. I felt like you know I was like yeah. I cut my hair ya know. My Dad hated short hair for some reason. And my mom always had very very long hair. She would just make remarks like, "Oh I could never cut my hair, your Dad would hate it." You know and so like it was like a, "I'm a grown up. I can cut my hair if I want." Um, but yeah. It felt pretty good. Everybody was kinda shocked. I had always had just such long hair.

Paige: How does your short hair make you feel now?

Isabel: Um, I kinda feel a little, it makes me feel a little unique. Like um, I dunno. I feel like a little bit of a swagger more than I used to you know? Like when I used to always describe myself as mousy, I just always thought of myself as mousy and plain and um, my name is Isabel so people would call me Isabel, Plain and Tall when I was younger.

Paige: Ah.

Isabel: They didn't mean it bad but you know, it kinda gets to you and so always Isabel Plain and Tall, Plain Jane, all those kind of stuff. So you know I think it makes me feel a little bit more unique and not so plain. And I you know I feel like I never used to get random compliments ever you know until I cut my hair short. and now just people will come up to me in a bar. Like one guy in New Orleans asked to take a picture with me.

Paige: *laughs*

Isabel: Because he liked my hair so much. I was like okkkkaaay.

Paige: That's funny. That's hilarious.

Isabel: I'll go along with that.

Paige: That's great. Um, how do you view other women with short hair?

Isabel: Um, I don't know what I really think about it. I guess I feel like a little comradery almost like we're in the same club. Like, hey, we got short hair. Like, I know that's kinda weird but I do.

Paige: No, you are not the person to say that. Believe it or not.

Isabel: It's kinda like people who drive a Jeep like, the Jeep thing kinda like the short hair thing.

Paige: Oh, that's so funny. When I did a practice interview, my friend who had short hair said that. She's like, like people with the Jeeps, like how they have the same thing. That is fantastic that you both said the same thing.

Isabel: That is too funny.

Paige: That is really funny.

Isabel: It's the Jeep thing.

Paige: You do like the head nod. I see you with your short hair. Um, was there a difference like before you cut your hair versus after you cut your hair? Like how you view short women? I mean, short haired women?

Isabel: Um, no, I can't really think of a difference, it's been so long.

Paige: Yeah.

Isabel: Um, I think I might maybe was kind've jealous of their bravery almost. You know, growing up in the South, it's like, you don't cut your hair short til you're like old. You know like when you go get your perm once every month and that's your hair. And um, but yeah, it was like oh man, they had to have some guts to do that, you know and um, and now I'm like naw, it doesn't take that many guts, it's just hair.

Paige: It's fun.

Isabel: I used to be a lot more sensitive about how my hair looked and um, you know if I got even the slightest haircut that I didn't like I would cry about like, "oh it's terrible!" I mean some of that's probably immaturity but now I'm like whatever it'll grow out, I'll get it cut again, it's fine.

Paige: Yeah. Um, how do you think others perceive your short hair?

Isabel: I don't know. I would imagine some people don't like it. Um, I dunno. I like to think that they're like, huh, like oh that was pretty gutsy to cut your hair off. I dunno that they are they probably don't care. *laughs* Everybody is pretty wrapped up with themselves and probably don't care but um, I don't know. I mean some people do come up to me and compliment me on my hair. You know I get the sense that they're like, "Oh, that's pretty cool."

Paige: Do you get people that ask you a lot like where you get it cut and things like that?

Isabel: Actually no, uh uh. A couple people have asked me where I go but no, I've been going to the same girl for six years I think.

Paige: Wow.

Isabel: Maybe. Loyal. I don't even tell her I just go do something.

Paige: When they know how to do your hair.

Isabel: "I don't like it, make me like it." And she does it. So.

Paige: There ya go. Um, what types of compliments and criticisms have you received?

Isabel: Um, I really don't think I've gotten any criticism. Well, um, my mom, when I first cut it my mom didn't like it. Um, and she, it was more, she didn't really say, it wasn't what she said it was just kinda like hmm, hmm. Okay.

laughs

Paige: Alright.

Isabel: Um, yeah, so, but that's. But people usually say well, oh I wouldn't want to do that because you know whatever. But for the most part people are like oh man that must be so low maintenance. You know or "oh your neck is never hot." I have a lot of friends that hate having their hair on their neck cause it gets hot. Um, but yeah, I get, the compliments I get are just like, people say like Oh that's so cool. I have had one girl in Atlanta ask where I get it done cause she thought it was an Atlanta stylist. And when I told her I go to a lady in Athens she only charges me for a boy haircut cause it's so short she fell off her chair," In Atlanta that would cost \$200!"

Paige: Oh my gosh. What.

Isabel: Ew, no, 2-3. But yeah, people call me they say I look like a pixie or like a fairy. I've gotten fairy a lot. Um, but yeah, yeah, um, I think that's all they really say. There's like, I love your hair. And one lady said, "that's a cute haircut" just random compliments. Like that never used to happen to me before. Just like walking out of Kroger, you know. Someone just yells over - I love your hair!

Paige: Yeah.

Isabel: Okay! Sweet.

Paige: I personally think it makes your eyes pop.

Isabel: Well, oh, thank you!

Paige: Yeah. I think there's just something about having short hair that, you just have nothing to hide behind. So it's like your face is there.

Isabel: Yeah, nobody used to say anything about my looks or anything and now they're like "you've got good bone structure so you can do it"

laughs I didn't think I did. I didn't before.

Paige: Um, describe to me any experiences you've had that revolve around your hair. I know you said the guy who randomly.

Isabel: ...wanted to take a picture of me, yeah. And you know and I left that bar because it was a bachelorette party in New Orleans, no Savannah and uh we left that bar and ended up coming back to it and he ended up telling his friends, he was like, "Oh you gotta come see this girl and her hair" I was like what is happening?! Um, trying to think if anything else that's happened about it. Um, not really. That's my only good story. Only good fun story.

Paige: Yeah. Um, okay, so obviously you have a significant other cause you are married.

Isabel: Mmhmm.

Paige: So um what was his reaction? Did he know you before and after?

Isabel: Yes.

Paige: Okay.

Isabel: He was kinda like do it, what's the big deal? You know, I had been talking about it for a couple days. Because you know a lot of people. Oh gosh, I got this a lot. After they knew it had been long before they said consistently right after I did it. What did your husband think? Like in this kind of surely he hated it tone. And he actually, he says he prefers it short he says he likes it better short. I would just usually put it up in a bun anyway.

Paige: I would always do that, too.

Isabel: Just throw it up.

Paige: What about your family?

Isabel: Um, a lot of my mom's side of the family is very, very Southern, well they're both very, very southern. And so my family um they either don't talk about it. I can kinda tell that they're

like avoiding it or it'll be like the one lady that actually cuts her hair short, too. Even though she's older than me and that's kinda like okay. She'll always compliment me and be like I wish I could do it that short. You know. Um, but yeah, I do get some of the guys they kinda sideways comments I guess sometimes like I can't even really think of um, I kinda block it out I'm sure. Since I don't really super get along with them, but uh, yeah, they would say like, "that looks like your hair..." and they'll point to like a boy or something like that. you know. But yeah, my husband's family whom I'm very close with now, we've been together a very long time, um they love it and they tell me to keep it short when I'm like eh, maybe I'll grow it out. They're like..no! Yeah...not really. But yeah, I can't really tell what my Dad thinks about it. I'm sure he doesn't like it but he actually. My parents are divorced and he re-married a lady and she has, she just cut her hair almost exactly like mine. So. We'll see.

Paige: Um, let's see - what about close friends?

Isabel: Um, I feel like my best best best friend, we hang out, she um, she's very complimentary of it and they all kinda, every once in awhile they'll say things like I wish I could cut my hair that short but...then got a reason they can't like oh my face is too round and I'm like round faces look fine with short hair. You know, um, you know like, there's a lot of people that say that they wish they could do that. Um, yeah very complimentary of it.

Paige: Um, tell me what your hairstyle says about you?

Isabel: My hair style, what it says about me. Oh gosh. I don't know.

Paige: *laughs* This is always where everyone is like, I need to think about this!

Isabel: I don't know cause I feel like a lot of girls with super short hair have more confident personalities than I do. So I feel like maybe I like masquerade as like this super confident person, cause I think they are and I'm super not.

Paige: *laughs* No one would ever know.

Isabel: I'm just hiding amongst you.

Isabel: So yeah, like, I feel like it says that I'm not super, one I feel like it says that I'm not super traditional um, like I don't think people look and me and go, what sorority were you in, you know? And yeah, you know like a little different. Yeah, just not traditional. Oh, and I thought of a story! So I'm a teacher and so um, Clarke county is very diverse and um I teach very young children as of now. And they cannot wrap their heads around my hair. Like, cause when you're a little girl, girls have long hair. Disney princesses have long hair and especially my Hispanic students, they do not get it. And um, I have this girl once and she was in Pre-K and about every 2 months or so or month she would ask me if I was a boy. And I'd say no, I'm a girl. And then she'd look at me very confused and say, well you have short hair. And I'd say yeah, I'm a girl with short hair and you're a girl with long hair, you know. And I said some boys have look hair and she was like, (cocks head to side) what? huh? She did not believe me. But yeah every month or so she'd be like you boy? Miss Isabel, you boy? And um, yeah I have another little boy this year. He's um from Venezuela, precious he's always very proper and he has his hair like perfect all the time. Precious little thing and he'd always just be like Miss Isabel you have boy hair. And I'd be like yeah, well I just have hair. You know. But it's funny that that young they're already like boys do this, girls do this.

Paige: Yeah, the gender roles are already in full swing.

Isabel: Yeah, I get super onto that when like the boys like hate pink. I sit um all down and say they're not boy colors and girl colors they're just colors. Because some little boys really like pink and yellow and I'm like no, no no, you can like pink.

Paige: Yeah, I mean historically, originally, the boy color was pink because it was closer with

red which was like the masculine color. And blue was girls. So.

Isabel: I get on that horse all the time.

Paige: What role does your hair play into your identity?

Isabel: I guess I do now perhaps kinda of pull my head a little bit higher. It's given me a little bit more confidence. Um, I feel like it's something that I can...it gives me a little bit more pep in my step. Like oh, I like my hair now. So funny all this about hair. All this is so tied into hair. It's so weird.

Paige: Yeah, yeah. I've just learned so much in like a research in everything that I've done. It's just so fascinating that it's different. It's just like you know, hair it is just dead matter on your head, but there's such significance to cultures. I've talked to people who are African American, I've talked to Latina and Indian, like all the women who have short hair and how much of their culture, like how much their parents were upset that they cut their hair because culturally like...

Isabel: Absolutely

Paige: Their hair is so significant and important.

Isabel: Yeah.

Paige: Yeah, it's different for those of us who are white because there's still like things attached to it, just in a different way, it's not quite like it.

Isabel: Yeah, I had an Indian friend growing up and her hair was just down to her ankles. And the first time she chopped it ya know to her back her parents got so mad at her. It's like, well, I was tripping over it. *laughs*

Paige: I can't imagine the headaches you would get from that!

Isabel: I know! Seriously.

Paige: Um, how does your hairstyle affect your self-confidence?

Isabel: Well, I would say it increases it. I do.

Paige: Is there anything else you would like to add? About your hair? You can always let me know things later if you can't think of something right now.

Isabel: If I think of something I'll e-mail.

Paige: Because I had somebody that was like, I forgot about this! Like *laugh*

Isabel: Because sometimes you think of things. Okay, I definitely will.

Paige: Hindsight is 20/20.

Isabel: Cool perfect.

Paige: Yeah. I can stop this.