Article

Haircut as a Catalyst for Identity Transformation and Social Perception: A Multidimensional Review

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Abstract

This study explores how changes in haircuts, often considered merely an aesthetic act, can trigger a drastic transformation in self-identity and social perception. Drawing from the author's significant personal experience, this study integrates psychological, sociological, and neuroscience perspectives to unravel the complexity of this phenomenon. Through a qualitative literature review approach, data was systematically collected from up-to-date journals, books, and scientific articles, further enriched by the author's introspective reflections as primary data. The research findings indicate that haircuts serve as an essential medium in identity construction and non-verbal communication, reflecting autonomy and self-expression. The dynamic interaction between personal and social identity is also proven to influence how individuals are publicly perceived, often triggering a restructuring of initial impressions. The social and family environment plays a crucial role in shaping adolescent appearance autonomy. From a neuroscience perspective, this "drastic change" phenomenon is explained by the brain's mechanisms in processing familiar and novel stimuli, where a new haircut can be considered a discrepancy requiring deeper cognitive processing. Further discussion elaborates on haircuts as a manifestation of self-actualization and a trigger for the halo effect and primacy effect in social perception, as well as explaining the dynamics of familiarity and novelty within the human visual system. In conclusion, haircuts are an agent of personal identity transformation and a catalyst for social perception that transcends mere physical aspects. This article asserts that hair is not just about aesthetics but represents self-evolution and a key to new social interactions, inspiring awareness of the importance of self-expression autonomy.

Keywords: Haircut; self-identity; social perception; neuroscience; fashion involvement

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Physical appearance often serves as a powerful initial cue in human social interactions, shaping first impressions and influencing how individuals are perceived. This phenomenon has garnered significant attention across various scientific fields, from social psychology to neuroscience, all striving to unravel its underlying complexities. Interestingly, seemingly simple changes in appearance can frequently trigger "drastic" effects on perception, both for oneself and for others. A profound personal reflection late at night, prompted by a trivial yet memorable everyday experience, unveiled this very question: how can something as simple as a haircut drastically alter a person's appearance? The author's personal experience, having neglected their hairstyle for years and being tied to external preferences, underwent a significant transformation after taking full control of their appearance choices. This change in haircut not only shifted the author's self-perception to be more positive and confident but also markedly influenced social perception from their surroundings, even leading to the impression of being "like a different person."

Changes in physical appearance, such as haircuts, are often viewed as purely aesthetic acts. However, beneath this seemingly simple action lies a complex and multidimensional meaning, encompassing psychological, social, and even neurophysiological aspects. In daily life, a change in

haircut can trigger intense social responses—from praise to identity confusion—both from oneself and the surrounding environment. This raises an intriguing question: why can a seemingly minor visual change create such a significant perceptual impact? Why can someone feel like a "new person" just by changing their haircut? This phenomenon opens up a broad discussion about how external appearance plays a crucial role in the formation of self-identity and social perception. In the context of adolescents and young adults, hairstyles are not merely a style choice but also a medium of expression, a symbol of status, and a means to negotiate personal and social identity. On the other hand, neuroscience indicates that the human brain possesses complex mechanisms for processing familiar and novel visual stimuli, including how the nervous system responds to visual changes that contradict stored memory patterns. By referencing deep personal experience and supported by up-to-date literature from various disciplines—social psychology, non-verbal communication, sociology of fashion, and visual perception neuroscience—this study attempts to uncover how changes in haircuts can become a catalyst for changes in identity and social perception. Through a qualitative approach and in-depth literature analysis, this article aims to offer a new perspective capable of bridging subjective experience with objective and verifiable scientific explanations.

1.2. Problem Formulation

Based on the background outlined above, this study formulates the following research questions:

1.2.1. How does a haircut function as a medium for self-identity expression and a symbol of social status?

1.2.2. How is the interaction between personal identity, social identity, and public perception influenced by changes in haircuts?

1.2.3. To what extent do the social environment and family interactions influence an individual's autonomy in their haircut choices?

1.2.4. How do neuroscience mechanisms explain the phenomenon of "drastic change" in visual perception due to haircut modifications?

1.2.5. How can the personal experience of a haircut change be explained through psychological, sociological, and neuroscience theories?

1.3. Research Objectives

In line with the problem formulation above, this study aims to:

1.3.1. Analyze the function of haircuts as a medium for self-identity expression and a symbol of social status.

1.3.2. Identify and explain the interaction between personal identity, social identity, and public perception as influenced by changes in haircuts.

1.3.3. Examine the influence of the social environment and family interactions in shaping individual autonomy regarding haircut choices.

1.3.4. Understand the neuroscience mechanisms underlying the phenomenon of "drastic change" in visual perception due to haircut modifications.

1.3.5. Elaborate on the personal experience of a haircut change within psychological, sociological, and neuroscience theoretical frameworks.

1.4. Research Benefits

This research is expected to provide the following benefits:

1.4.1. Theoretical Benefits

Theoretically, this research is expected to enrich the body of knowledge in the fields of social psychology, sociology, and cognitive neuroscience by providing a more comprehensive understanding of the multidimensional relationship between physical appearance (specifically

haircuts), self-identity, and social perception. The results of this study can serve as a basis for the development of new theories or the modification of existing theories regarding the importance of visual aspects in identity construction and social interaction.

1.4.2. Practical Benefits

Practically, this research is expected to raise individual awareness of the importance of autonomy in self-expression through appearance, as well as its impact on self-confidence and psychological well-being. For parents and the social environment, this research can serve as input to better understand the psychological dynamics of adolescents in their search for identity and the importance of providing a conducive supportive environment. Furthermore, this article can inspire more interdisciplinary research on how simple visual changes can trigger significant transformative effects in both social and individual contexts.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Concepts of Self-Identity and Social Perception

Self-identity and social identity are essential foundations for individuals, dynamically formed and influenced by internal and external interactions (Santosa & Yuliana, 2024). This identity encompasses an individual's unique characteristics and how they present themselves (Barker, 2004, in Santosa & Yuliana, 2024), as well as an awareness of belonging to social groups and its emotional value (Tajfel, 1986, in Armayati et al., 2019). Adolescence is a crucial period for identity exploration, where individuals strive to be unique, independent, and accepted by their social environment (Erikson, in Ramdhanu et al., 2019). In this process, external appearance becomes an important medium for self-expression and seeking recognition. Social perception—the process of observing and interpreting others as social objects—plays a crucial role. Visual elements like haircuts function as significant nonverbal cues, forming initial impressions and influencing how individuals are identified in social interactions (Aronson et al., 2010, in Satria & Neviyarni, 2024; Taylor et al., 2014, in Satria & Neviyarni, 2024). The strength of the self-identity formed also determines an individual's adaptation to social changes and pressures, including those from social media that often display pseudo-ideal standards (Soesanto & Eka, 2025). Therefore, a haircut not only reflects personal identity but also serves as a visually processed social signal that directly influences how an individual is perceived.

2.2. Haircuts as Self-Expression and Status Symbols

A haircut is a powerful artifactual medium of nonverbal communication, transcending mere physical aesthetics (Edward T. Hall in Octavia, 2023; Mulyana, 2016, in Octavia, 2023). As part of fashion, a haircut allows individuals to express themselves, form a personal image, and embed meanings that will be interpreted by others (Frings, in Cholilawati, 2021, in Octavia, 2023; Putri & Patria, 2022, in Octavia, 2023). Its communicative functions include individualistic expression, social role performance, and differentiation between individuals or groups (Barnard, 2019, in Octavia, 2023). This phenomenon is particularly prominent among adolescents, where haircuts become a way to show personality, seek peer acceptance, and follow social media trends (Maghfiroh et al., 2025). Furthermore, a haircut also functions as a symbol of social status, where certain styles can indicate access to resources or a higher economic level (Maghfiroh et al., 2025). Historically, the evolution of men's hairstyles, from ancient Egyptian wigs to afros as symbols of identity pride in the Civil Rights Movement, reinforces their role as reflections of culture, fashion, and status markers (Horsch, 2023). The example of dreadlocks further demonstrates how hairstyles can be an expression of religious beliefs, ethnic pride, and spiritual identity, later expanding into global fashion trends (Muarabagja, 2022). Thus, a haircut is not just a personal choice but a rich nonverbal statement, serving as a tool for self-expression, an affiliation marker, and a status symbol that actively shapes social perception.

2.3. Psychological Impact of Physical Appearance Changes

Fashion involvement indicates an individual's deep level of interest in fashion products, going beyond basic needs and focusing on trends, brands, and quality (Savitri, 2021). This involvement reflects an individual's bond with an object based on personal needs, values, and interests (Natalie & Japarianto, 2019, in Savitri, 2021). For those with high fashion involvement, appearance is paramount as it's seen as a reflection of personality and social status (Hermanto, 2016, in Savitri, 2021). Indicators include a desire to always be trendy, a preference for unique styles, and a belief that fashion can attract attention and reflect personal characteristics (Kim, in Sari & Indrawati, 2018, in Savitri, 2021). In adolescents, mass media significantly influences fashion involvement by showcasing idol figures who are emulated to boost self-confidence and social acceptance (Lestari, 2022). Fashion consumption behavior, including haircut choices, often becomes a social act driven by the desire to follow trends or imitate idols, and can even spread among adolescents, underscoring the strong social dimension in appearance changes (Jaelani, 2011).

2.4. Influence of Social Environment and Family Interactions on Appearance Choices

Adolescents' appearance choices are heavily influenced by their social environment and family interactions. Adolescence is a period of identity transition, where the dynamics of relationships with parents and the environment play a significant role (Tim Paramitra, 2011). The family, as the immediate environment, is fundamental in shaping adolescent appearance. Supportive relationships with parents positively correlate with self-esteem and emotional adjustment, which influence how adolescents view their appearance (Coopersmith, 1967; Gecas & Schwalbe, 1986; Kernis, 2000 in Intezar, 2009; Qotrunnada, 2023). Democratic parenting styles that encourage adolescent participation in decisions tend to foster a strong identity, unlike authoritarian or permissive parenting which can lead to identity confusion (Santrock, 2011; Qotrunnada, 2023). Supportive family interactions through explanation, acceptance, and empathy are crucial for healthy identity development (Hauser et al. in Qotrunnada, 2023). Additionally, psychological issues like depression, sometimes rooted in the environment, can also affect attention to appearance (Tim Paramitra, 2011). The influence of the broader social environment also shapes appearance choices; individuals may feel pressure to conform or, conversely, assert their identity amidst dominant norms, as experienced by women in male-dominated industries (Rotimi et al., 2025). Social support networks also help individuals manage stress and build resilience to environmental challenges, which in turn is reflected in style choices as a form of self-expression and self-care (Frydenberg, 2014; Rotimi et al., 2025). Thus, a supportive family environment and social interactions that allow for identity negotiation are vital in shaping an individual's appearance choices.

2.5. The Phenomenon of "Drastic Change" in Visual Perception

The processing of visual information by the human brain is highly specialized, with specific cortical areas responsible for recognizing objects and visual categories (Vlcek et al., 2020). Intracranial EEG (iEEG) research by Vlcek et al. (2020) indicates that the brain has specialized networks involved in recognizing familiar features (e.g., faces) and processing novel or altered details. They found brain channels that selectively respond to scenes and objects in regions like the PHLG (Parahippocampal Place Area - PPA) and RSC (Retrosplenial Cortex - MPA) for scenes, and FUG (Fusiform Gyrus), LTC (Lateral Temporal Cortex), and FC (Frontal Cortex) for objects (Vlcek et al., 2020). These areas indicate hierarchical and specific visual processing.

Simple changes like a haircut can be considered a novel stimulus that modifies the familiar features of a recognized face. The human visual system continuously processes dynamic input, transforming it into abstract representations and tracking changes (King & Wyart, 2019). The brain simultaneously represents various sequential images without entirely replacing previous visual content, even maintaining an "update signal" that propagates throughout the neural hierarchy (King & Wyart, 2019). This explains why "low-level" feature changes like a haircut can have a significant

impact on overall perception, as the brain processes "optical flows" or discrepancies from what is expected (King & Wyart, 2019).

The process of visual perception also involves a complex interaction between feedforward (signals from low to high levels) and feedback (signals from high to low levels) (Ahissar et al., 2009; Bullier, 2001; Enns & Di Lollo, 2000; Lamme & Roelfsema, 2000; Lamme et al., 1998, in Mohsenzadeh et al., n.d.). Research using ultra-rapid serial visual presentation (ultra-RSVP) shows two stages of processing: a rapid bottom-up activation cascade and the emergence of categorical information requiring longer recurrent processing (Mohsenzadeh et al., n.d.). The decoding accuracy of categorical information decreases with higher stimulus presentation speed, indicating that the brain requires deeper feedback processing to confirm challenging new information. Therefore, a relatively simple haircut change can trigger the impression of a "different person" in observers because the brain requires more time and greater feedback processing effort to integrate new and unfamiliar visual information into existing representations, confirming the phenomenon of "drastic change" in visual perception.

3. Research Methods

3.1. Type and Research Approach

This research employs a qualitative approach with an exploratory and interpretative literature review method. The qualitative approach was chosen due to its focus on describing and interpreting social phenomena, as well as its ability to answer 'why' and 'how' a behavior or perception is formed. This approach allows the researcher to delve into subjective experiences (in this case, the author's personal experience as the idea's trigger), confront personal logic with existing phenomena, and connect them with relevant theories and literature. The primary objective is to develop an in-depth understanding and, if possible, generate new concepts or perspectives regarding the impact of haircut changes on self-identity and social perception. Thus, this research does not rely on numerical data collection or variable manipulation but rather focuses on textual and conceptual analysis to interpret social reality.

3.2. Data Collection Methods and Techniques

The data collection method for this research is library research. This technique involves the systematic collection, identification, and analysis of various relevant written sources. The primary data in this study is the author's personal phenomenon related to the experience of a haircut change and its impact. Secondary data consists of scientific literature (journals, books, preprints, credible online articles) discussing concepts of self-identity, social perception, nonverbal communication, fashion involvement, social environmental influences, and cognitive neuroscience related to visual processing, familiarity, and novelty. This data collection technique was chosen because it does not require respondents, questionnaires, or direct field observation, but rather utilizes the rich information that has been documented and published, which is then analyzed in depth to support the arguments built from the author's raw ideas.

3.3. Data Collection Procedures

The data collection procedures were conducted systematically in several stages to ensure the relevance and completeness of the information obtained:

3.3.1. First Data Collection Procedure: Key Concept Identification

The initial stage involves identifying key concepts emerging from the author's raw ideas and personal experiences. These include self-identity, social perception, haircut as self-expression, fashion involvement, familiarity, novelty, and the phenomenon of "drastic change" in visual perception. These keywords served as the basis for subsequent literature searches.

3.3.2. Second Data Collection Procedure: Systematic Literature Search

Literature searches were conducted on scientific databases such as Google Scholar, PubMed, ScienceDirect, and preprint repositories (e.g., Preprints.org) using a combination of the identified keywords. The primary focus was on the latest (up-to-date) and relevant articles published within the last five to ten years to ensure the timeliness of information. Search filters were also applied to prioritize studies focusing on the psychology of perception, sociology of appearance, and visual cognitive neuroscience.

3.3.3. Third Data Collection Procedure: Source Selection and Evaluation

Each source found was evaluated based on its relevance, credibility, and scientific quality. Articles or book chapters were selected if they directly addressed or provided theoretical support for the key concepts of the research. Sources containing empirical data related to adolescent fashion involvement, social influence on appearance, or brain mechanisms in visual processing were given high priority. Citations contained within the found sources were also examined to uncover additional relevant references.

3.3.4. Fourth Data Collection Procedure: Relevant Information Extraction

Relevant information was extracted from each selected source. This involved recording concept definitions, supporting theories, key research findings, methodologies used (if empirical studies were cited), and main arguments that supported or enriched the understanding of the relationship between haircuts, identity, and visual perception. Each extraction was noted along with complete citation details to facilitate writing and cross-referencing.

3.3.5. Final Data Collection Procedure: Narrative and Conceptual Synthesis

In the final stage, all collected information was synthesized into a cohesive narrative. This process involved grouping findings by theme, identifying relationships between concepts, and forming logical arguments to explain how a change as simple as a haircut can trigger a "drastic change" in perception. This synthesis also considered how the author's personal experience could be explained and reinforced by existing theories, forming an innovative conceptual framework inspired by personal experience.

3.4. Analysis Techniques and Conclusion Drawing

The data analysis technique used is qualitative content analysis, which is interpretive, combined with a deductive-inductive approach. This approach allows the researcher to identify patterns, themes, and relationships between concepts from the collected literature, and then interpret them within the context of personal experience and research questions. Conclusions will be drawn based on a deep synthesis and interpretation of the literature.

3.4.1. Conceptual Descriptive Analysis

The first stage involves a deep description of relevant key concepts from the literature. This includes definitions of self-identity, social identity, fashion involvement, nonverbal communication, and the basic mechanisms of visual perception in the brain (e.g., the concepts of familiarity and novelty, feedforward and feedback). The goal is to build a comprehensive foundational understanding of each element contributing to the "drastic change" phenomenon.

3.4.2. Comparative Cross-Theory Analysis

Next, a comparative analysis is conducted between various theories and research findings from the fields of psychology, sociology, and neuroscience. This comparison aims to identify consistencies, differences, or gaps in the understanding of how physical appearance (especially haircuts) affects

identity and perception. The author will compare how different theories explain the psychological, social, and neurological impacts of appearance changes.

3.4.3. Introspective Phenomenological Interpretation

The author's personal experience data will be interpreted through the lens of the analyzed theories. This introspective phenomenological approach involves deep reflection on how the haircut change influenced the author's self-perception and the social reactions experienced. The goal is to contextualize and enrich literature findings with concrete subjective perspectives, explaining "why" and "how" those experiences occurred.

3.4.4. Synthesis of Findings to Build Arguments

All analyzed information (concepts, theories, comparisons, and personal experience) is then synthesized to build a cohesive argument. This synthesis will answer the main question: how something as simple as a haircut can drastically change a person's appearance, and how this phenomenon can be explained psychologically, sociologically, and neurophysiologically. This will form the core of the discussion in Chapter 4.

3.4.5. Formulation of Implications and Action Recommendations

Based on the synthesis of findings, the theoretical and practical implications of this research will be formulated. This includes contributions to the understanding of visual perception and identity, as well as action recommendations. These recommendations may include suggestions for individuals regarding self-expression, for society regarding acceptance of differences, or even directions for future research in this field, aligning with the article's goal to inspire action.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents the results of the conducted literature analysis, integrated with the author's personal phenomenon, followed by an in-depth discussion. The findings of this study are not new empirical data but rather a comprehensive synthesis of key concepts obtained through literature review, which are then validated and enriched by the author's subjective experience. The discussion will examine how changes in haircuts, as an aspect of physical appearance, drastically influence self and social perception, considering psychological, sociological, and neurophysiological perspectives.

4.1. Research Findings

4.1.1. The Central Role of Haircuts in Identity Construction and Nonverbal Communication

Literature review confirms that a haircut is not merely an aesthetic choice but an essential medium in the construction of self-identity and social identity, as well as a powerful means of nonverbal communication. The concept of fashion involvement (Savitri, 2021) shows that individuals with high interest in fashion view appearance as a reflection of personality and social status (Hermanto, 2016, in Savitri, 2021). A haircut becomes a "silent language" (Edward T. Hall in Octavia, 2023) used to express individuality, display social roles, and differentiate individuals or groups (Barnard, 2019, in Octavia, 2023). This aligns with the author's experience of "finding the best version" of themselves after changing their haircut, which was previously governed by "invisible pressures" and a lack of courage to make personal decisions. This change marks the adoption of a more authentic self-identity, distinct from the previous identity influenced by external control.

4.1.2. Dynamic Interaction Between Personal Identity, Social Identity, and Public Perception

Findings indicate a dynamic interaction between personal identity, social identity, and how individuals are perceived by others. Identity is dynamically formed by internal and external interactions (Santosa & Yuliana, 2024), encompassing individual uniqueness and awareness of group

membership (Tajfel, 1986, in Armayati et al., 2019). The author's personal experience—where friends felt they were "like a different person they didn't know" and the author themselves felt "more respected" and "honored"—strongly indicates that changes in appearance, particularly haircuts, trigger a restructuring of social perception (Aronson et al., 2010, in Satria & Neviyarni, 2024). This perception not only influences how others judge but also strengthens the author's self-identity and confidence in social interactions, even attracting "positive praise" and making them "much more confident when meeting new people."

4.1.3. Influence of Social Environment and Family Interactions on Appearance Autonomy

Literature review underscores that adolescent appearance choices are heavily shaped by the social environment and family interactions. Adolescence is a crucial period for identity exploration where autonomy from parents begins to be demanded (Tim Paramitra, 2011). Parental parenting styles, especially democratic ones, facilitate the development of a strong identity (identity achievement) by encouraging participation and freedom of opinion (Santrock, 2011; Qotrunnada, 2023). The author's experience of having to "dare to rebel" against "invisible pressure" from their mother regarding haircut choices, eventually taking control of their own decisions during college, reflects the importance of autonomy in self-expression and how support or restraint from the immediate environment (family) significantly shapes appearance choices and the development of personal identity. This also aligns with how social pressures, such as mass media trends and peer expectations, influence adolescent fashion involvement (Lestari, 2022).

4.1.4. Neuroscience Mechanisms Behind the "Drastic Change" Phenomenon in Visual Perception

From a neuroscience perspective, the phenomenon of "drastic change" in visual perception can be explained through the mechanisms of human brain visual information processing, particularly related to the concepts of familiarity and novelty. The brain has specialized areas (e.g., fusiform gyrus) for recognizing faces and objects (Vlcek et al., 2020), and continuously compares current visual input with stored representations (King & Wyart, 2019). A change in "low-level" features like a haircut can be considered a novel stimulus that disrupts a familiar visual pattern. Research shows that the brain processes "optical flows" or discrepancies between two sequential images (King & Wyart, 2019) and requires recurrent processing (Mohsenzadeh et al., n.d.) to integrate new or challenging categorical information. The author's sensation of feeling profoundly "different" in front of the mirror after a haircut, and friends' reactions describing them as "like a different person," are direct manifestations of this mechanism: the observer's brain must work harder to integrate the new visual pattern into existing familiar representations, thereby creating an impression of significant identity change or a visually "different person."

4.2. Discussion

This discussion integrates the findings above to provide a comprehensive understanding of how something as simple as a haircut can drastically change a person's appearance and its impact on individuals and social interactions.

4.2.1. Haircut as a Manifestation of Autonomy and Self-Actualization

The author's personal experience, from conforming to their mother's choices to "rebellion" and taking their own decision in choosing a haircut, strongly supports the concept of self-identity as a dynamic entity and the result of individual agency (Santosa & Yuliana, 2024). This transition reflects the unique identity search during adolescence (Erikson, in Ramdhanu et al., 2019) and the drive for self-actualization through authentic self-expression. The haircut chosen by the author is not just a cut but a symbol of independence and the courage to emanate their internal identity that had been suppressed. The satisfaction felt by the author after the haircut change confirms that physical appearance, especially when aligned with internal identity, has a profound psychological impact on

self-confidence, self-esteem, and emotional well-being (Coopersmith, 1967; Gecas & Schwalbe, 1986; Kernis, 2000 in Intezar, 2009; Qotrunnada, 2023).

4.2.2. Halo Effect and Primacy Effect in Haircut-Triggered Social Perception

The author's haircut change triggered significant social responses, from an "aura of farming" (a literal translation that might sound odd; perhaps implying a rustic or less refined appearance initially, which then transformed) to feeling "more respected and honored." This phenomenon can be explained through the halo effect and primacy effect in social perception. The halo effect occurs when one positive trait (e.g., an attractive and modern haircut) creates an overall positive impression of an individual (Taylor et al., 2014, in Satria & Neviyarni, 2024). People tend to generalize strong initial impressions, which are often formed by nonverbal cues like appearance. The primacy effect explains that information received first (i.e., the author's new appearance) carries greater weight in forming long-term impressions. Friends' reactions of "not recognizing" and considering the author "like a different person" indicate that the new haircut created a "tipping point" in their cognitive schema about the author's identity, drastically altering long-held perceptions. This confirms that a haircut, as a status symbol and self-expression (Maghfiroh et al., 2025), fundamentally influences how individuals are perceived in the social matrix.

4.2.3. Dynamics of Familiarity and Novelty in the Human Visual System

The author's question about "is this because human eyes are unaccustomed to unfamiliar things?" is comprehensively answered by neuroscience findings on familiarity and novelty processing. The brain efficiently encodes stable visual representations (familiar) but is highly sensitive to novelty or discrepancies (King & Wyart, 2019). When a familiar haircut is replaced with a drastic new style, the brain receives a novelty signal. Brain areas specialized for face and object recognition (Vlcek et al., 2020) will activate recurrent processing mechanisms (Mohsenzadeh et al., n.d.) to attempt to integrate these new features with existing familiar representations. This process requires more time and greater cognitive effort. The impression of a "drastic change" or "different person" experienced by observers is a result of the mismatch between stable visual memory and salient new input. This is not just about "being unaccustomed," but about the brain's adaptive mechanisms that prioritize the detection of change as part of continuous visual information processing.

4.2.4. Haircut as an Agent of Identity Transformation and Catalyst for Social Perception

Holistically, the phenomenon of a drastic haircut change is not just about aesthetics but functions as an agent of personal identity transformation and a catalyst for social perception. For individuals, this can be a marker of maturity, courage, and self-discovery, as experienced by the author. For observers, this change triggers a significant recalibration of perception, altering their established frame of reference. Fashion involvement, family parenting styles, and social pressures all contribute to an individual's decision to change their appearance, which then neurologically triggers a novelty response in the observer's brain. This article argues that a haircut, in social and psychological contexts, possesses transformative power that transcends mere physical aspects, capable of reshaping self-identity and how a person is seen and interacts within their environment. Therefore, hair can indeed be a "treasure" not only in terms of appearance but as a representation of self-evolution and a key to unlocking new social interactions.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Conclusion

This research has comprehensively elaborated on how something as simple as a haircut can trigger drastic changes in self-identity and social perception, extending far beyond mere aesthetic aspects. Through the integration of findings from psychology, sociology, and neuroscience, further

reinforced by the author's introspective experience, it can be concluded that a haircut is a strong manifestation of self-identity and nonverbal communication. It serves as a medium for personal expression, a marker of group affiliation, and a symbol of status that actively shapes how individuals perceive themselves and are perceived by others. Changes in haircuts can function as a catalyst for autonomy and self-actualization, especially during adolescence, where individuals negotiate their identity away from external influences like family and social pressure. Social responses to these appearance changes can often be explained through concepts like the halo effect and primacy effect, demonstrating how initial visual impressions hold significant weight in forming long-term perceptions. Furthermore, from a neuroscience perspective, this "drastic change" phenomenon is proven to be the result of the brain's mechanisms in processing familiarity and novelty stimuli. The brain actively tracks discrepancies from stored visual patterns, so a significant haircut change can trigger a "different person" response because it requires greater cognitive effort to integrate new visual information. Thus, this article asserts that a haircut possesses fundamental transformative power, capable of reshaping self-image and influencing the dynamics of social interaction. Hair, in this context, is not merely a physical attribute but a "treasure" representing self-evolution, the courage to express oneself, and a key to unlocking new and more authentic social interactions.

5.2. Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this research, several recommendations can be formulated for various parties, with the hope of inspiring action and further understanding.

5.2.1. For Individuals

It's hoped that every individual, especially adolescents and young adults, can become more aware that appearance choices, including haircuts, are a powerful form of self-expression. Daring to make personal decisions about one's appearance can boost self-confidence and support the process of authentic self-discovery, without being overly burdened by social pressures or expectations that don't align with their true selves.

5.2.2. For Families and Social Environments

Parents and society are advised to better understand and support the identity-seeking process in adolescents, including through appearance choices. Providing space for autonomy in self-expression with democratic parenting styles and a supportive environment can help adolescents develop a strong identity and positive self-esteem, rather than triggering confusion or passive rebellion. It is important to reduce hasty judgments based solely on physical appearance.

5.2.3. For Educational Institutions

Educational institutions can integrate material on self-identity, social perception, and nonverbal communication into their curriculum, especially at levels relevant to adolescent development. This can help students understand the multidimensional impact of appearance and interaction styles, as well as foster acceptance of diverse forms of self-expression among students.

5.2.4. For Future Researchers

This research opens many opportunities for further study. It is recommended for future researchers to conduct empirical studies (e.g., surveys, in-depth interviews, or neuroscience experiments) to quantitatively validate these qualitative findings. Research can focus on:
- Studying the specific impact of certain types of haircuts on social perception across different cultures.
- Testing the correlation between the level of fashion involvement with self-esteem and social acceptance.
- Utilizing neuroimaging technologies (e.g., fMRI) to observe brain activity in real-time as individuals process drastic appearance changes in others.

- Investigating the role of social media more deeply in shaping body image and adolescent appearance choices.

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