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#### We'll continue this debate with a picture of hair as an object of beauty being stripped from Black and Brown people. Slave masters, colonizers, and intruders have kicked our doors down and demanded that we turn over our cultural identities - controlling hair has historically been a favorite tool of domination in the arsenal of oppressors.

#### This isn't unique to the United States of Amerikkka - my home country partakes in the same views about hair that are rooted in racial hierarchies, casteism, and the patriarchy, especially for people in the press.

Rohina Katoch Sehra, [Sehra cares about the politics of style and beauty. She writes to amplify the voices of the people, movements and businesses that matter. She lives in New Delhi, India with her husband and dog- son Obi Wan.] 3-3-2020, "Indian Women Open Up About The Pressure To Keep Their Hair Long And Straight," HuffPost, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/indian-women-hair-pressure-long-straight\_l\_5e54236ec5b66729cf6064e3 //n33l

In India, hair and femininity are inextricable. The trendsetting industries of film and television, firmly in the grip of conservatism, haven’t shown much interest in broadening our understanding of femininity ― on or off screen, no A-list actors sport hair that isn’t well past their shoulders, and an artfully waved [lob](https://www.cosmopolitan.in/beauty/news/a10718/heres-how-choose-best-haircut-your-hair-type) is considered radical. Popular fashion designers like [Sabyasachi](https://www.instagram.com/sabyasachiofficial/?hl=en), who premised their careers on challenging conventions of femininity, are now associated with [deeply traditional iconography](https://www.vogue.in/content/sabyasachi-mukherjee-on-his-idea-of-the-perfect-indian-bridal-makeup) that features women in long, demure hairstyles. Quick to co-opt this idiom, the makeup and fashion influencer communities [mimic](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=92fKge8EGCk) these looks with relish. The country’s biggest national pageant has been [panned](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-48442662) for selecting candidates with bizarrely [identikit hair](https://www.indiatoday.in/trending-news/story/miss-india-2019-organisers-blasted-for-fair-skinned-finalists-can-t-tell-them-apart-says-internet-1539494-2019-05-31). Miss India contestants. They all have the same hair, and the SAME SKIN COLOUR, and I'm going to hazard a guess that their heights and vital stats will also be similar. So much for India being a 'diverse' country. [pic.twitter.com/L4yXG0WvRu](https://t.co/L4yXG0WvRu) — labellagorda (@labellagorda) [May 27, 2019](https://twitter.com/labellagorda/status/1132911972968673280?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) In ads and in movies, short-haired women are either mouthy tomboys, athletes or staunch careerists. They are almost never mothers or love interests. Short hair is for feminists and intellectuals ― a shrill, frumpy archetype devoid of softness and disinclined to pander. The renunciation of hair is acceptable only when sanctioned by [religion](https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/3yCPhcnn27tZ8S2vnJXpt8m/losing-your-hair-to-save-your-soul) or [custom](https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/tirumalas-gleaming-scalps-spell-shining-prospects-for-hair-business/articleshow/55776683.cms?from=mdr), not when it is a political statement or an act of self-love. Class and caste readings of hair throw up depressingly predictable themes. For example, when Priyanka Gandhi, scion to the first family of India’s oldest political party, cut her hair, she became the subject of [fawning press](https://www.hindustantimes.com/india/lovin-the-priyanka-cut/story-AfzjTnMfMyt5ILKpBjHxbO.html) that likened her look to her grandmother’s, the first female prime minister of India. Hair diversity is a problem, too. Big banner movies and commercials almost never feature curly haired leads. Curls do not feature in hair product ads and do not get the kind of care they need at most salons, because stylists consider kinky hair difficult. Curly brides seldom wear their natural hair and go pin-straight on their big day; mainstream bridal fashions simply don’t factor in curls. All of this underscores a cultural obsession with straight, “proper” hair. Shockingly, the country has only [just begun](https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/magazines/panache/indias-latest-acceptance-with-curls-lead-to-the-emergence-of-a-rs-200-crore-industry/articleshow/63860464.cms) to wake up to hair diversity. We talked to eight Indian women about their fraught experiences with their hair. Priyanshi Jariwala, Surat, Gujarat (Western India) Jariwala owns a sustainable fashion [line](https://www.instagram.com/thekhadicult/?hl=en) that champions a hardy hand-spun fabric with ties to India’s freedom movement. Growing up, she struggled with her curls. “I wanted to straighten them all the time only to be accepted. I remember a morning from my fourth grade when my teacher asked me if I’d combed my hair enough. She suggested I do it multiple times to get rid of the ‘shabby look.’” Jariwala has strong feelings about her community’s grooming expectations of women, considered attractive only if they are “tall, fair, slim and have long hair, even if the man has none on his head.” She’s glad for a dear friend who was so fed up she “cut her hair short to avoid marriage proposals. Women with short hair don’t qualify for Daughter-In-Law of the Year,” she said. Jariwala believes that women in visual professions, such as modeling, can sometimes pay for asserting their individuality. “I know fashion models who lost work because they decided to chop their hair. I think this bias is deeply rooted in the idea that long hair hides the ‘less attractive’ features, like chubby cheeks and an undefined jawline.” When it comes to her own profession, she plays it safe. “I work in a creative field where people are more accepting of your choices and appreciate nonconventional haircuts/colors, but I find myself at a crossroads when it comes to a conference or business summit. I do not remember ever leaving my curls open in a meeting. They are either tied in a bun or styled.” Then, colored hair signals sexual adventurism and could get women into trouble. “Women with crazy hair colors are [believed] to be asking for it, just how they’re asking for it when they wear short skirts or tops with deep necklines,” she told HuffPost. Despite comparisons to [Maggi noodles](https://in.pinterest.com/pin/350647520986186910/?lp=true), she’s found peace with her hair. “I think my hair is a representation of my wild and carefree side. People tell me that my hair makes me come across as a warm, approachable individual.” Rachana Iyer, Mumbai, Maharashtra (Western India) [Tamil](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamils) by origin, Iyer is a mental health [advocate](https://www.instagram.com/rayiyer/?hl=en) and heads corporate social responsibility for a private bank. Fair skin and long hair are prized in her community and Iyer wrestled with her wavy curls, first growing them to waist length, then chopping them off to make a political statement. “I felt compelled to challenge the notion that I could look my best only in long hair,” Iyer told HuffPost. “I went from blunt to pixie and finally a beautiful red faux hawk! I absolutely loved the feeling of buzzing my hair and almost got quite addicted to it. Most people were shocked and upset that I would even take such a drastic step. This made me want to keep cutting my hair. I wanted people to realize how narrow their view of beauty is. People link femininity to having long hair and assume things about you based on its length. Although I do identify as bisexual, most people saw my short hair and called me names like ‘butch’ or ‘tomboy.’ They assumed that my sexuality and hair were somehow linked.” Iyer doesn’t care. She has attended weddings in traditional saris sporting buzzed hair, a vision undoubtedly jarring to her conservative community. “People assume you are a ‘junkie’ or a ‘punk’ when they see you with a buzz cut. I think coloring longer hair does not evoke the sort of response that coloring shorter hair does. I remember walking into a very popular bank and the lady at the counter openly mocked me to her colleagues and treated me poorly because of my hair. It got so bad that I had to escalate this to the manager. Society, especially women, can be really quick to judge you based on your hair. People also tend to slander a woman’s character, and although very subtle, I have personally experienced people thinking I am ‘very open,’ ‘forward thinking.’ They have taken the liberty to flirt even when I was clearly not interested.” Iyer believes that workplaces aren’t hair-inclusive. “A lot of companies have a policy about the types of colors allowed on women’s hair. Advertising agencies and the entertainment industry are a bit more relaxed, but there are still clear assumptions made based on the length of your hair. Medium or long hair that is straight, not frizzy and not colored, is considered the most professional. Most Indian corporations definitely consider buzz cuts unprofessional. It is assumed that you will not take your work seriously if your hair is fun!” Theyie Keditsu, Kohima, Nagaland (Northeastern India) Keditsu teaches at a government college and [advocates](https://www.instagram.com/mekhalamama/?hl=en) for the revival of traditional indigenous textiles and local artisanship. “[Nagas](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Naga-people" \t "_blank) (from the northeastern part of India) in general hold long, black and thick hair as the gold standard of feminine beauty. This beauty standard is both a result of racial prevalence and patriarchal notions of femininity,” she told HuffPost. Keditsu’s hair journey straddles the personal and the political. “I started shaving parts of my hair as a teenager,” she said. “And then completely when I was 27. And then in parts from 2017 onwards. My parents disliked my latest experiments so much that they even prayed for me! For them, my mohawk was unbecoming of a mother and a responsible working woman. For some others, it clashed with their idea of Naga beauty and femininity. My husband loved it, as did most of my friends. The most recent experiments with my hair were simply a personal quest to explore what being beautiful meant to me. I’d reached a point of self-acceptance ― realizing that hair and other accoutrements of beauty were at once superfluous and vital to one’s personhood. With my mohawk, I wanted to challenge ideas of what a mother should look like, and what made a woman my age beautiful. In a very deliberate way, I chose to sport these hairstyles because they expand the idea of what it means to be feminine.” Keditsu would like young women to “see hair as a means not an end, not as an extension of oneself or one’s sense of worth but as a tool to express one’s politics or worth.” Niharika Chugh Vali, Nagpur, Maharashtra (Central India) Business owner Chugh Vali runs a children’s play [area](https://www.instagram.com/jumpnagpur/?hl=en) that encourages experiential learning. Her parents are Punjabi and Parsi, two cultures that value conformity in appearance, so she has only just now leaned into her big, curly hair. “I have worked before as a television news anchor and my hair was always a concern for everyone. It was gelled and tied back most times and when it was left open, it took twice as much time as anyone else to straighten it. The option of enhancing my natural hair or going curly did not exist,” she told HuffPost. “Like all curly-haired people, I’ve been advised by stylists and well-wishers to ‘do something about it,’ to get my hair smoothed or straightened or treated with keratin, as if the sight of my natural hair could hurt someone’s eyes,” she said. Shame around hair was learned in early childhood. “The volume was unmanageable, so it was cut in a short bob. Once I did decide to grow it out, I made sure it was tied back real tight and pinned well so nobody ever had to see what it really looked like,” she said. Today, Chugh Vali credits the [Curly Girl Method](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Curly_Girl_Method) and Indian actors like [Kangana Ranaut](https://in.pinterest.com/search/pins/?rs=ac&len=2&q=kangana%20ranaut%20curly%20hair&eq=Kangana%20Ranaut%20curly%20hair&etslf=3517&term_meta%5b%5d=kangana%7Cautocomplete%7C0&term_meta%5b%5d=ranaut%7Cautocomplete%7C0&term_meta%5b%5d=curly%7Cautocomplete%7C0&term_meta%5b%5d=hair%7Cautocomplete%7C0) and [Taapsee Pannu](https://in.pinterest.com/search/pins/?q=Taapsee%20Pannu%20curly%20hair&rs=typed&term_meta%5b%5d=Taapsee%7Ctyped&term_meta%5b%5d=Pannu%7Ctyped&term_meta%5b%5d=curly%7Ctyped&term_meta%5b%5d=hair%7Ctyped) for throwing out notions around “curly hair being an inferior hair type. It is also finally leading to a conversation about curly hair, and how its care is so different from the default straight-hair regimen we all follow blindly.” Mother to a 7-year-year old, she loves that animated children’s heroines like [Merida](https://www.google.com/search?q=Merida%2C+Brave&tbm=isch&ved=2ahUKEwjizvmkpsrnAhVLFnIKHXAJCfYQ2-cCegQIABAA&oq=Merida%2C+Brave&gs_l=img.3..0i67j0l9.2884.3809..4135...0.0..0.144.865.0j7......0....1..gws-wiz-img.rq6wzyL8HC0&ei=TAlDXuL4CcusyAPwkqSwDw&bih=618&biw=1366) (“Brave”) and [Moana](https://www.google.com/search?q=Moana&sxsrf=ACYBGNRkwiw9u8oXmmLLXvAzl-SxmO5kaQ:1581451646764&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjl34m9psrnAhWqyDgGHY2UC0sQ_AUoAXoECDkQAw&biw=1366&bih=618) have curly hair.

#### Hair is steeped in violent policing and judgement that make existence unbearable - why is the hair of Indian yogis attributed to their religious dedication but the shiny mane of blonde supermodels is associated with idiocy? It begs the question - do we style our hair or does our hair style us?

Siri Hustvedt, [Hustvedt is an author and lecturer of psychiatry at Cornell University with several published best-selling novels and highly-regarded research papers. She received a PhD from Columbia University in New York and has received the Gabarron International Award for Thought and Humanities, the Man Booker Prize, and the LA Times Book Prize for Fiction] 9-23-2015, "Untangling the Cultural Meaning of Hair," New Republic, https://newrepublic.com/article/122893/notes-toward-theory-hair //n33l

When my daughter was in elementary school, she wore her hair long, and every night before I began reading aloud to her, I sat behind her to comb and then braid it. If left loose during her hours of hectic sleep and dreams, Sophie’s hair was transformed into a great bird’s nest by morning. I especially liked the braiding ritual, liked the sight of my child’s ears and the back of her neck, liked the feel and look and smell of her shiny brown hair, liked the folding over and under of the three skeins of hair between my fingers. The braiding was also an act of anticipation—it came just before we crawled into her bed together and settled in among the pillows and sheets and I began to read and Sophie to listen. Even this simple act of plaiting my child’s hair gives rise to questions about meaning. Why do more girl children wear their hair long in our culture than boy children? Why is hairstyle a sign of sexual difference? I have to admit that unless a boy child of mine had begged me for braids, I probably would have followed convention and kept his hair short, even though I think such rules are arbitrary and constricting. And finally, why would I have been mortified to send Sophie off to school with her tresses in high-flying, ratted knots?  All mammals have hair. Hair is not a body part so much as a lifeless extension of a body. Although the bulb of the follicle is alive, the hair shaft is dead and insensible, which allows for its multiple manipulations. We are the only mammals who braid, knot, powder, pile up, oil, spray, tease, perm, color, curl, straighten, augment, shave off, and clip our hair. The liminal status of hair is crucial to its meanings. It grows on the border between person and world. As Mary Douglas argued in Purity and Danger, substances that cross the body’s boundaries are signs of disorder and may easily become pollutants. Hair attached to our heads is one thing, but hair clogged in the shower drain after a shampoo is waste. Read unlimited stories like this one.1 year for $10.Subscribe Hair protrudes from all over human skin except the soles of our feet and the palms of our hands. Contiguity plays a role in hair’s significance. Hair on a person’s head frames her or his face, and the face is the primary focus in most of our communicative dealings with others. We recognize people by their faces. We speak, listen, nod, and respond to a face, especially to eyes. Head hair and more intrusively beard hair exist at the periphery of these vital exchanges that begin immediately after birth, and once we become self-conscious, our concern that our hair is “in place,” “unmussed,” or “mussed in just the right way” has to do with its role as messenger  to the other. A never-combed head of hair may  announce that its owner lives out side human society altogether—is  a wild child, a hermit, or an insane  person. It may also signify beliefs  and political or cultural marginality. Think of the dreadlocks of Rastafarians or the long, matted hair of  the sannyasis, ascetic wanderers in  India. The combed-out Afro or “natural” for women and men in the 1960s communicated a wordless but potent political story. As a high school student, I thought of Angela Davis’s hair as a sign, not only of her politics, but of her formidable intellect, as if her association with Herbert Marcuse and the Frankfurt School could be divined in her commanding halo. Was the brilliant Davis a subliminal influence on my decision in the middle of the 1970s to apply a toxic permanent wave solution to my straight, shoulder-length blond hair, a chemical alteration that was literally hair- raising? The Afro style (sort of) on me—not just a white girl, but an extremely white girl—turned the “natural” into the “unnatural.” I was hardly alone in adopting the look. As fashions travel from one person or group to another, their significance mutates. Note the bleached blond hair of famous black sports stars or the penchant for cornrows among certain white people. Despite its important role as speechless social messenger, hair is a part of the human body we can live without. Losing a head of hair or shaving our legs and underarms or waxing away pubic hair is not like losing an arm or a finger. “It will always grow back” is a phrase routinely used to comfort those who have suffered a bad haircut. Hair that touches a living head but is itself dead has an object-like quality no other body part has, except our fingernails and toenails. Hair is at once of “me” and an alien “it.” When I touch the hair of another person, I am similarly touching him or her, but not his or her internally felt body. I remember that when my niece Juliette was a baby, she used to suck on her bottle twirling her mother’s long hair around her fingers as her eyes slowly opened and closed. It was a gesture of luxurious, soporific pleasure. Well after her bottle had been abandoned, she was unable to fall asleep without the ritual hair twiddling, which meant, of course, that the rest of my sister was forced to accompany those essential strands. Asti’s hair, as part of Juliette’s mother but not her mother’s body proper, became what D. W. Winnicott called a “transitional object,” the stuffed animal, bit of blanket, lullaby, or routine many children need to pave the way to sleep. The thing or act belongs to Winnicott’s “intermediate area of experience,” a between zone that is “outside the individual” but is not “the external world,” an object or ritual imbued with the child’s longings and fantasies that helps ease her separation from her mother. Hair as marginalia lends itself particularly well to this transitional role. Every infant is social from birth, and without crucial interactions with an intimate caretaker, it will grow up to be severely disabled. Although the parts of the brain that control autonomic functions are quite mature at birth, emotional responses, language, and cognition develop through experience with others, and those experiences are physiologically coded in brain and body. The lullabies, head and hair stroking, rocking, cooing, playing, talk, and babble that take place between parent and baby during infancy are accompanied by synaptic brain connectivity unique to a particular individual. The cultural-social is not a category that hovers over the physical; it becomes the physical body itself. Human perception develops through a dynamic learning process, and when perceptual, cognitive, and motor skills are learned well enough, they become automatic and unconscious—part of implicit memory. It is when automatic perceptual patterns are interrupted by a novel experience, however, that we require full consciousness to reorder our expectation, be it about hair or anything else. When Sophie went off to school with her two long, neat braids swinging behind her, she did not disturb anyone’s expectations, but when the psychologist Sandra Bem sent her four-year-old boy, Jeremy, off to nursery school wearing the barrettes he had requested she put in his hair, he was hounded by a boy in his class who kept insisting that “only girls wear barrettes.” Jeremy sensibly replied that barrettes don’t matter. He had a penis and testicles and this fact made him a boy, not a girl. His classmate, however, remained unconvinced, and in a moment of exasperation, Jeremy pulled down his pants to give proof of his boyhood. After a quick glance, his comrade said, “Everybody has a penis. Only girls wear barrettes.” Most boys in contemporary Western culture begin to resist objects, colors, and hairdos coded as feminine as soon as they have become certain of their sexual identity, around the age of three. Jeremy’s fellow pupil seems to have been muddled about penises and vulvas, but adamant about social convention. In this context, the barrette metamorphosed from innocuous hair implement to an object of gender subversion. The philosopher Judith Butler would call Jeremy’s barrette-wearing a kind of “performativity,” gender as doing, not being. Girls have more leeway to explore masculine forms than boys. Unlike barrettes on a boy, short hair on a girl is not subject to ridicule, noteworthy because the “feminine” has far more polluting power for a boy in our culture than the “masculine” has for a girl. During three or four years before she reached puberty, another niece of mine, Ava, had a short haircut and was sometimes identified as a boy. One year she played with gender performance in the costume she chose for Halloween: half of her went as a girl, the other half as a boy. Hair was a vital element in this down-the-middle disguise. The long flowing locks of a wig adorned the girl half. Her own short hair served the boy half. I began the fifth grade with long hair, but at some point in the middle of the year I chopped it into what was then called a pixie cut. When I returned to school newly shorn, I was informed that the boy I liked, a boy who had supposedly liked me back, had withdrawn his affection. It had been swept away and discarded at the hairdresser’s along with my silky locks. I recall thinking that my former admirer was a superficial twit, but perhaps he had succumbed to a Goldilocks fantasy. He would not be the last male personage in my life to fixate on feminine blondness and its myriad associations in our culture, including abstract qualities such as purity, innocence, stupidity, childishness, and sexual allure embodied by multiple figures—the goddesses Sif and Freya and the Valkyries of Norse mythology, the multitudes of fair maidens in fairy tales, numerous heroines in Victorian novels and melodramas, and cinematic bombshells, such as Harlow and Monroe (both of whom I love to watch onscreen). The infantile and dumb connotations of blond may explain why I have often dreamed of a buzz cut. The fairy-tale and mythological creatures so dear to me as a child may explain why I have had short hair as an adult but never that short and did not turn myself into a brunette or redhead. A part of me must hesitate to shear myself of all blond, feminine meanings, as if next to no hair would mean severing a connection to an earlier self. Iris, the narrator of my first novel, The Blindfold, crops her hair during a period in her life of defensive transformation. She wanders around New York City after dark wearing a man’s suit. She gives herself the name of a sadistic boy in a German novel she has translated: Klaus. The gap between what I was forced to acknowledge to the world— namely, that I was a woman—and what I dreamed inwardly didn’t bother me. By becoming Klaus at night I had effectively blurred my gender. The suit, my clipped head and unadorned face altered the world’s view of who I was, and I became someone else through its eyes. I even spoke differently as Klaus. I was less hesitant, used more slang, and favored colorful verbs. My heroine’s butch haircut partakes of her second act of translation, from feminine Iris to masculine Klaus, a performance that belies the notion that appearance is purely superficial. By playing with her hair and clothes, she subverts cultural expectations that have shaped her in ways she finds demeaning. Short hair or long? Interpretations of length change with time and place. The Merovingian kings (ca. 457–750) wore their hair long as a sign of their high status. Samson’s strength famously resided in his hair. The composer Franz Liszt’s shoulder-length hair became the object of frenzied, fetishistic female desire. The mini narratives of television commercials for formulas to cure male baldness reinforce the notion that the fluff above is linked to action below. Once a man’s hair has been miraculously restored, a seductive woman inevitably appears beside him on the screen to caress his newly sprouted locks. But then shampoo commercials for women also contain sexual messages that long, and sometimes short, frequently windblown tresses will enchant a dream man.

#### The affirmative is part and parcel of the same system that is coded against Black and Brown hair - the press always prioritizes a false and naive form of objectivity that inevitably excludes some.

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In the replies to Roberts's viral tweet was New Orleans-based WDSU anchor [Christina Watkins](https://www.instagram.com/cwatkinstv/), who [tweeted](https://twitter.com/CWatkinsWDSU/status/1290979964389654529) back a short video of herself wearing knotless braids and a message of solidarity, complete with crown emoji: "Yesssss! Come through, black women on TV with braids!!!! Wearing mine for the first time, too!" In January 2021, Terry, the weekend sports anchor/reporter of WREG 3 in Memphis, joined Roberts and Watkins in their protective style on-screen debuts. The brevity of Terry's [tweet](https://twitter.com/samariaterry/status/1350596967739621377) was reflective of the situation's gravity: Mustered up the courage to rock braids on air! "It was ingrained in my brain that professional hair was straight," says Terry. "I learned this in school, from watching people on TV growing up, from image consultants that we have at stations that I [previously] worked in… mustering up the courage was really hard." After another Black anchor at her station [posted a negative comment](https://twitter.com/SymoneTV/status/1292517349854261255) she received from a viewer after wearing braids on-air, Terry was worried about how her own hair would be received by viewers. "We're so presentable and relatable and people feel like they know us," Terry explains. "They see us out, they speak to us, they will message you, and they will tell you what they like and what they don't like." "If they say, 'Wow, I really like Christina's hair,' maybe the next time an employee of theirs comes into [their] workplace in corporate America, they won't be as shocked, because they will recall seeing their 'news lady' with hair like that." The potential criticism from viewers is enough to dissuade some Black women reporters from wearing a natural or protective hairstyle. But the pressures to conform to a specific standard of beauty aren't always so forthright. They are also coded within the contractual language of workplace dress codes that limit the look of professionalism for Black women as opposed to women of other races or ethnicities — further contributing to a history of oppression in which Black women are forced to sacrifice their self-expression to become more palatable. In 2019, Brittany Noble Jones, a news anchor who formerly worked at WJTV in Jackson, Mississippi, [wrote a Medium piece](https://medium.com/@thenoblejournalist/why-i-disappeared-from-the-news-desk-at-wjtv-in-jackson-mississippi-bd734b1affb3), in which she says she was fired from her job after she wore her natural hair on air. She claims that after she had her son, she asked if she could stop straightening her hair. According to Noble Jones, she was told that her hair looked "unprofessional and the equivalent to throwing on a baseball cap to go to the grocery store." A spokesperson for the station denied that Noble Jones's hair was the reason for her termination, telling [Today](https://www.today.com/style/brittany-noble-was-told-her-natural-hair-was-unprofessional-fired-t146857), "Allegations that Ms. Jones' employment was terminated for her choice of hairstyles have no basis in fact and are vigorously denied." "With some of our other [non-Black] counterparts, nobody ever questions when somebody goes a little shorter [in length] because it's the summertime," says Pringle. "Or [if they] added a little bit of highlights because it's fall or [if] they're gonna let it grow out because it's wintertime. Nobody questions if they decide to curl wand their hair one day or wear it straight another day. The same flexibility and respect given to women who may have a different hue should be given [to Black women] without having to have a federal law passed." Many of the stories we hear about Black hair discrimination are in corporate industries, but there is a degree of uniqueness to hair discrimination in broadcast journalism due to the sheer level of visibility of on-air reporters. This visibility is intensified even more by the existence of social media. And while the overwhelming amount of responses and opinions can be daunting, this hypervisibility is exactly why these women believe it's more important than ever to push for representation in their field. Terry discloses that her biggest takeaway from going viral was the number of people who weren't aware of the fierce hair discrimination Black news reporters endure. "The issue is if you're not Black, if you're not a woman, if you're not in broadcast, you would never know these experiences even existed," reasons Pringle. "You'd never know that there are people that sit in news directors' offices and beg and plead with them to change their hair." "As Black women on TV, there are so many eyes on us," shares Watkins. "Eyes from people of all backgrounds. They look at us as a trusted source. To see someone who is able to switch up their hair, whether it be braids, locs, twist-outs, blowouts — to see someone who can do that on a platform like [the] one I have, it gives other people who may not have seen something like that before a different idea. If they say, 'Wow, I really like Christina's hair,' maybe the next time an employee of theirs comes into [their] workplace in corporate America, they won't be as shocked, because they will recall seeing their 'news lady' with hair like that." While there are trolls who aim to invalidate and dismiss their experiences, all four women have received mostly positive feedback on their hair from the folks watching at home, many of whom say they have been inspired to share their own stories and begin new journeys of hair love. In many cases, wearing their hair in natural or protective styles has actually made these newscasters more relatable to Black viewers. "[There are] people who are showing their children [my hair] and their children are excited about wearing braids," Roberts says. "That is why it's important. When we show who we really are on the news people say, 'She looks just like me! Her hair is just like mine! Maybe I can be on the news one day.' [We are] indirectly and directly impacting people and letting them know that there's space for you here. You can do this, too." Pringle has received messages from viewers saying that she is the reason they went natural, as well as notes from parents who say that she has made their daughters with short hair more confident in themselves. "It's a great reminder for people that… when being yourself, the world will adjust. Period," Pringle shares. "[I hope to reach] women who look like me, whether old, young, or my same age, [and] remind them that you can show up just as you are, and that is beyond good enough."

#### This isn't just a phenomenon in the news - we find ourselves complicit in the structures of violence within debate. A Sikh wearing a turban being called a terrorist, a person with blonde hair being called an idiot, and a person with long hair being called a bitch are all real and conceivable examples of violence that have occurred in debate. These instances result in skewed perceptions and psychological harm - only deconstructing hair as a starting point to think of ourselves and one another can solve perception-based violence. The role of the judge is to endorse the best strategy to resist perception-based violence in the context of how we view one another.

#### Thus, we advocate "a communal buzz-cut" as a symbolic act of sexual and racial liberation allied with collective advocacy that says fuck you to codification and embraces the beauty of a blank slate. This is the act of driving with friends to get your hair cut, using box dye with others in the rec center bathroom, and carving eyebrow slits at protests - we ought to work together to recreate beauty through a queer and colored lens.

Jenna Igneri, [Igneri is an author and freelance journalist that writes predominantly about hair and it's transformative power. She is a professional hair stylist.]5-31-2017, "A Brief Look At The Empowering History Of The Female Buzz Cut," Nylon, https://www.nylon.com/articles/significance-of-female-buzz-cuts //n33l

Once a look reserved for the margins, the buzz cut has recently surged in popularity with women and can be seen on more heads than we can count. In 2017 alone, we’ve noticed a number of [powerful celebrities](http://www.nylon.com/articles/bleach-and-buzz-celeb-hair-trend) take the follicular leap, whether for a movie role or as a personal choice. Of course, long before this hairstyle became buzz-worthy celebrity trend (no pun intended), it has been a style worn by women from all walks of life for decades, for reasons that transcend trendiness and instead find their roots in politics and activism. While many simply associate the look with the rebellious, punk aesthetic, it’s a historically important symbol in both black and queer culture and has been used as a means to combat gender norms and white ideas of femininity. Long embraced by women of color, the buzz cut has been worn by black icons like Grace Jones and Pat Evans, proving that conforming to white beauty standards is not a mandate. Evans, one of the biggest (and highest paid) models of the ‘70s, rocked a bald head in defiance against an industry that did not embrace black beauty values. In an interview with [Ben Arogundade](http://www.arogundade.com/pat-evans-black-model-cover-girl-for-the-ohio-players.html), author of [Black Beauty](https://www.amazon.com/Black-Beauty-Celebration-Ben-Arogundade/dp/156025341X), Evans explains that she was uncomfortable with the modeling and fashion industries’ obsession with straight hair and the pressures that were placed on black models to conform. To her, embracing baldness was the highest form of protest. The buzz cut has also been long associated with queer women and the battle against heteronormative beauty ideals. And as writer [June Thomas](http://www.advocate.com/current-issue/2016/1/11/short-length-my-true-loves-hair) explains, while not every queen woman has short hair, and not every short-haired woman is queer, short haircuts have commonly become associated with queer identity. She considers short haircuts serving as a “lesbian rite of passage” of sorts, explaining in an article in [The Advocate](http://www.advocate.com/current-issue/2016/1/11/short-length-my-true-loves-hair) that the way queer women wear their hair is a more obvious way to signal their queerness to others. While not all of these shorter haircuts are necessarily buzz cuts, that ultra-short crop is certainly one commonly used option. We've definitely come a long way from the time when the buzz cut was a rarely seen occurrence and exclusively the domain of black and queer cultures. Now, while the look still retains those historical ties, it is also seen on a much wider variety of women, and the path to the buzz cut is different for every woman—a personal journey, as told through her hair. We talked to four women who sport the hairstyle, as well as two psychologists, to break down the significance of why so many women are getting buzz cuts today. From the dismantling of gender conformity to the volatility of the current political atmosphere, the buzz has taken on new meaning for women of all races, identities, and backgrounds. “I’ve always felt the most sexy, confident, and powerful after I shaved my head,” says [Clara Rae Natkin](https://www.instagram.com/clara_rae/?hl=en), a makeup and visual artist who has been playing with the length of her hair since the age of 18. From chopping all of her hair off into a shaggy pixie to going for the full buzz, her hair decisions have been emotionally charged. “I’ve always felt like my outward appearance needed to match what or how I was feeling internally,” she says, “I wanted to transform my life, and the quickest way I knew how to transform my outsides was to cut off all of my hair.” Natkin treats buzzing her head as a new beginning, a rebirth of sorts. Speaking of the second time she buzzed it all off, she tells me, “I felt like I needed to start over and force myself to be in what I call ‘fetus mode,’ in order to transform my life again without any hair or makeup—just being completely raw. Having a buzzed head was slightly like having armor against the world. Now, I’m growing it out again because I feel like I’m reaching yet another stage of my life where I want to be gentler and softer with myself.” Similarly, others found the act of cutting off all of their hair very releasing—even without a corresponding emotional tie. [Cherie Camacho](https://www.instagram.com/cheriecamacho/?hl=en), associate manager of team and culture at Glossier, never felt attached to her hair and cut it off simply because she wanted to. “I gave myself a pixie cut in my bathroom one day after work. I stood in front of the mirror with a pair of craft scissors and started chopping it off. I didn’t blink at all—it was very cathartic,” she says. Eventually going to a salon to transform her DIY pixie into a full-on buzz cut, Camacho says that she 100 percent plans on maintaining it. “This is the sexiest I’ve ever felt in my life! I feel so badass in a way that I’ve never felt before. I’m finally in love with myself.” [Vijayeta Sinh PhD](https://www.drsinh.com/), psychologist and owner of NYC Family Therapy, explains that sometimes people will use their bodies to communicate something they’re feeling, especially if they have difficulty communicating with words; a change as drastic as a buzz cut can be liberating, and even life-changing. (And no, she’s not having a Britney Spears in 2007 moment, so don’t even ask that.) Aside from emotional significance, a woman’s choice of hairstyle can also be extremely political. Sinh says that it may be a way of giving a “middle finger” to gender-related norms of femininity and beauty. As [Leslie Carr](http://lesliecarr.com/), clinical psychologist, tells me: A woman’s hair is deeply rooted in symbolism. It’s often viewed as an element of female power and personal expression, but it’s also deeply tied to the patriarchy. Women often receive certain types of messages—like that men prefer long hair on women—which is something that psychologists and evolutionary theorists postulate because long, healthy hair is a sign of fertility. Meanwhile, older women are often told that they need to make their hair shorter as if they’ve aged out of the ability, or the right, to wear their hair long and loose. Hair, for women, is deeply personal and also deeply political.

#### Give me a 30 and/or a donation at https://www.facebook.com/donate/309997691109640/1010973033165238/

#### (alternatively, you should share it on facebook)- millions of young people don’t have hair due to alopecia, cancer, or other conditions that induce hair loss and they deserve the ability to decide what hair can do for them. The same negative hypervisibility that stigmatizes natural hair on TV can be retooled to be a positive project - you should engage in material resistance strategies that benefit everyone and prove that debate has potential to be good.

## 2

#### Interpretation: Debaters must disclose affirmative frameworks, advocacy texts, and advantage areas thirty minutes before round if they haven't read the affirmative before

#### Violation: They didn't

A screenshot of a computer

Description automatically generated

#### Standards:

#### 1~ Clash- Not disclosing incentivizes surprise tactics and poorly refined positions that rely on artificial and vague negative engagement to win debates. Their interpretation discourages third- and fourth-line testing by limiting the amount of time we have to prepare and forcing us to enter the debate with zero idea of what the affirmative is. Negatives are forced to rely on generics instead of smart contextual strategies destroying nuanced argumentation.

#### 2~ Shiftiness- Not knowing enough about the affirmative coming into round incentivizes 1ar shiftiness about what the aff is and what their framework/advocacy entails. That means even if we could read generics or find prep, they'd just find ways to recontextualize their obscure advocacy in the 1ar.

#### 3~ Hairy Stuff - not disclosing the affirmative is an attempt to engage in internal exclusion - you don't let queer debaters of color figure out what the best resistance strategies are by artificially limiting the amount of preparation we can do. We could've had a sweet debate about the 1AC and its relation to perception but you didn't give me anything I needed to prepare for that debate. Independent reason to reject the team - the affs strategy is a method of control that seeks to stop debaters from collaborating to find the best resistance strategies - ows on immediacy bc debaters are being hurt bc of perception rn and constantly.

#### Fairness – it's a prereq to judge evaluation

#### Education – it's a portable impact

#### Accessibility – psychic violence is a prereq to being in debate

#### CI – a) brightlines are arbitrary and self-serving which doesn't set good norms b) it collapses since weighing between brightlines rely on offense defense

#### Neg theory is drop the debater – a) Prep skew – infinite prep means they frontline every shell enough to be efficient at DA and skew substance enough b)

#### No rvi

#### ~a~ Baiting—they'll bait the theory debate and prep it out—justifies infinite abuse since they'll get away with unacceptable practices

#### ~b~ 1AR all-outs—they'll collapse entirely to theory which crowds out substance and kills education.

#### 1NC theory first - 1~ Abuse was self-inflicted- They started the chain of abuse and forced me down this strategy 2~ Norming- We have more speeches to norm over whether it's a good idea since the shell was read earlier.

### 3

#### CP Text: In a democracy, a free press should prioritize objectivity over advocacy except for reporting about freedom of expression.

#### That checks back against censorship and ruptures government communication choke points.

Gillmor 14 [Dan, American technology writer and columnist. He is director of News Co/Lab, an initiative to elevate news literacy and awareness, at Arizona State University's Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication, “When Journalists Must Not Be Objective”, 12-02-2014, https://www.wired.com/2014/12/when-journalists-must-not-be-objective/]//pranav

For journalists, there should be no objectivity, no neutrality, about freedom of expression and other key liberties that are at the foundation of self-rule. There should be an open bias toward openness and freedom—and news people who don’t use their reports to push those values are not fit to call themselves journalists.

Powerful governments and corporations are leading the attack against these core values, usually in the guise of protecting us or giving us more convenience. But these powerful entities are also creating a host of choke points. And the result is a locking down of computing and communications: a system of control by others over what we say and do online — a betrayal of the Internet’s decentralized promise.

What are these choke points? The most obvious is what’s happening to the Internet itself. In America and a number of other countries the telecommunications industry — often working with government, and in some cases outright owned by government — is deciding, or insisting on the right to decide, what bits of information get to people’s devices in what order and at what speed, or whether they get there at all. This is what network neutrality is all about in the U.S.: whether we, at the edges of the networks, get to make those decisions or whether telecom companies like Comcast, Verizon, and AT&T will ultimately have that power, as they insist they need. The worries about corporate media consolidation in the 1990s seem quaint next to this kind of consolidation. Free speech? It’ll be as free a Comcast et al want it to be if they get the upper hand.

#### Watchdog Journalism is uniquely key to protection of Free Speech.

Massa 17 Mark Massa 3-14-2017 "News media’s watchdog role more important then ever" https://www.greenfieldreporter.com/2017/03/14/news-medias-watchdog-role-more-important-then-ever/ (S.J.. Professor; Director of the Boisi Center for Religion and American Public Life.)//Elmer

Thomas Jefferson, no stranger to being savaged in the press, once famously remarked that if forced to choose between a government without newspapers or newspapers without government, he would surely choose the latter. That’s how important our third president and author of the Declaration of Independence thought uncensored publication and dialogue were to our overall freedom. Jefferson made the observation before we even had a First Amendment, in which the Founding Fathers enshrined his sentiment. Their true genius, seen throughout the Constitution, was in understanding human nature and the inevitable temptation of power. They knew their experiment in self-government could succeed only with an engaged and informed citizenry, vigilant to abuses exposed by a free and unfettered press. The Founders’ protection of free speech and press stands alongside separation of powers (which protects liberty through checks and balances within the government) as their most important and enduring legacy. Throughout our history, a watchdog press has played an immeasurable role in preserving and expanding American liberty; a private-sector institution — with explicit Constitutional recognition and protection — holding the public sector accountable by freely reporting on its actions, with the people able to weigh those reports at the polls. In the mid-19th century, the abolitionist press played a critical role in changing public opinion in favor of emancipation. Muckraking reporters and authors in the early 1900s exposed corruption and rallied voters to support political and labor reforms. In the 1970s, a president was driven from office by enterprising reporters. And in every community large and small, at all levels of government, for more than two centuries, those wielding power have done so knowing someone might be watching, with the Constitution and the courts safeguarding the right to publish their findings. The people and commercial enterprises fulfilling this watchdog role have evolved over time, in some cases for the better, in others not. Changing technologies, demographics, habits, passions and partisanship have altered the media landscape and pose new challenges to our democracy. Abraham Lincoln said “let the people know the truth and the country will be safe.” Finding that truth is journalism’s mission, but the mission is harder to fulfill with a polarized citizenry increasingly seeking to be affirmed rather than informed, and with some in news and “infotainment” devoted less to truth than to causes (or ratings). Americans today can share a common apartment wall but essentially live in different worlds, depending on their media preferences and viewing habits. Pulitzer Prize winning journalist and author David Maraniss wisely warns against succumbing to the “myth of the idyllic past,” but it’s worth pondering whether there was a time not long ago when there was at least more consensus as to what was fact. More immediately problematic for democracy at the state and local level is the economic concerns in the newspaper industry. Digital platforms and newspapers’ inability to fully monetize the internet harken an old adage of the garment industry: “You can’t make up in margins what you’re giving away for free.” As Professors Danny Hayes and Jennifer Lawless of George Washington and American universities have noted in their research, “when the content of local news deteriorates — as has happened nationwide in an era of newsroom austerity — so do citizen knowledge and participation…. This development has potentially profound implications,” they write. “To the extent that a knowledgeable and participatory citizenry is a marker of a healthy political system, the demise of local news should raise concerns about the operation of electoral democracy. An anemic news environment makes it more difficult for citizens to hold their local representatives accountable.” And that, in the long run, is something we can ill afford.

#### Free Speech is an impact magnifer.

D’Souza 96, PhD Phil @Oxford, 1996 (Frances, Prof. Anthropology Oxford, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/hearings/19960425/droi/freedom_en.htm?textMode=on>)

**In the absence of freedom of expression** **which includes a free and independent media**, **it is impossible to protect other rights, including** the right to **life**. **Once governments** are able to **draw a cloak of secrecy over their actions** and to remain unaccountable for their actions then **massive human rights violations can, and do, take place**. **For this reason alone** the right to **freedom of expression**, specifically protected in the major international human rights treaties, **must be considered** to be **a primary right**. It is significant that one of **the first indication**s **of a government's intent**ion **to depart from democratic principles is** the ever increasing **control of information** by means of gagging the media, and preventing the freeflow of information from abroad. At one end of the spectrum there are supposedly minor infringements of this fundamental right which occur daily in Western democracies and would include abuse of national security laws to prevent the publication of information which might be embarrassing to a given government: at the other end of the scale are the regimes of terror which employ the most brutal moves to suppress opposition, information and even the freedom to exercise religious beliefs. It has been argued, and will undoubtedly be discussed at this Hearing, that **in the absence of free speech** and an independent media, **it is** relatively **easy for governments to capture**, as it were, **the media** and to fashion them into instruments of propaganda, **for the promotion of ethnic conflict, war and genocide.** 2. Enshrining the right to freedom of expression The right to freedom of expression is formally protected in the major international treaties including the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights. In addition, it is enshrined in many national constitutions throughout the world, although this does not always guarantee its protection. Furthermore, freedom of expression is, amongst other human rights, upheld, even for those countries which are not signatories to the above international treaties through the concept of customary law which essentially requires that all states respect the human rights set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by virtue of the widespread or customary respect which has been built up in the post World War II years. 3. Is free speech absolute? While it is generally accepted that freedom of expression is, and remains the cornerstone of democracy, there are permitted restrictions encoded within the international treaties which in turn allow for a degree of interpretation of how free free speech should be. Thus, **unlike the American First Amendment** Rights **which allow few, if any, checks on free speech** or on the independence of the media, the **international treaties are concerned that there should be a balance** between competing rights: for example, limiting free speech or media freedom where it impinges on the individual's right to privacy; where free speech causes insult or injury to the rights and reputation of another; where speech is construed as incitement to violence or hatred, or where free speech would create a public disturbance. Given that these permitted restrictions are necessarily broad, the limits of free speech are consistently tested in national law courts and, perhaps even more importantly, in the regional courts such as the European Commission and Court of Human Rights. In recent years several landmark cases have helped to define more closely what restrictions may be imposed by government and under what circumstances. In particular, it has been emphasised by the European Court that any restriction must comply with a three-part test which requires that any such restriction should first of all be prescribed by law, and thus not arbitrarily imposed: proportionate to the legitimate aims pursued, and demonstrably necessary in a democratic society in order to protect the individual and/or the state. 4. Who censors what? Despite the rather strict rules which apply to restrictions on free speech that governments may wish to impose, **many justifications are** nevertheless **sought by governments to suppress information** which is inimical to their policies or their interests. **These** justifications **include arguments in defence of** national and/or state **security**, **the public interst,** including the need to protect public morals and public order **and perfectly understandable attempts to prevent racism, violence, sexism**, religious intolerance and damage to the indi-vidual's reputation or privacy. The mechanisms employed by governments to restrict the freeflow of information are almost endless and range from subtle economic pressures and devious methods of undermining political opponents and the independent media to the enactment of restrictive press laws and an insist-ence on licensing journalists and eventually to the illegal detention, torture and disappearances of journalists and others associated with the expression of independent views. 5. Examples of censorship **To some** the right to **free speech may appear** to be one of the **fringe** human rights, especially **when compared to** such violations as **torture** and extra-judicial killings. It is also sometimes difficult **to dissuade the** general **public that censorship**, generally assumed to be something to do with banning obscene books or magazines, **is** no **bad** thing! It **requires a recognition of** some of the **fundamental principles of democracy** **to understand why censorship is** so **immensely dangerous**. **The conditon of democracy is** that **people are able to make choices** about a wide variety of issues which affect their lives, including what they wish to see, read, hear or discuss. While this may seem a somewhat luxurious distinction preoccupying, perhaps, wealthy Western democracies, **it is a comparatively short distance between government censorship** of an offensive book **to the silencing of political dissidents**. **And** the distance **between such silencing and the use of violence** to suppress a growing political philosophy which a government finds inconvenient **is even shorter**. **Censorship tends to have small beginnings and to grow rapidly**. **Allowing a government to** have the power to **deny people information**, **however trivial**, **not only sets in place laws** and procedures **which can and will be used by those in authority against those with less authority, but** **it** also **denies people the information which they must have in order to monitor their governments actions and to ensure accountability**. **There have been** dramatic and **terrible examples of** the role that **censorship** has played **in international politics** in the last few years: to name but a few, the extent to which the media in the republics of former **Yugoslavia** were manipulated by government for purposes of propaganda; the violent role played by the government associated radio in **Rwanda** which incited citizens to kill each other in the name of ethnic purity and the continuing threat of murder issued by the Islamic Republic of **Iran** against a citizen of another country for having written a book which displeased them. 6. The **link** between poverty, war and denial of free speech **There are undoubted connections between access to information**, or rather the lack of it, **and war**, **as indeed there are between poverty**, the right to freedom of expression and development. One can argue that **democracy aims to increase participation** in political and other decision-making at all levels. In this sense **democracy empowers** people. **The poor are denied access to information on decisions which deeply affect their lives**, are thus powerless and have no voice; the poor are not able to have influence over their own lives, let alone other aspect of society. **Because of this** essential **powerlessness, the poor are unable to influence the ruling elite** **in whose interests it may be to initiate conflict and wars in order to consolidate their own power and position.** Of the 126 developing countries listed in the 1993 Human Development Report, war was ongoing in 30 countries and severe civil conflict in a further 33 countries. **Of the total 63 countries in conflict, 55 are towards the bottom scale of the human development index** which is an indicator of poverty. There seems to be no doubt that **there is a clear association between poverty and war**. It is reasonably safe to assume that the vast majority of **people do not ever welcome war**. **They are** normally **coerced,** **more often than not by propaganda**, **into fear, extreme nationalist sentiments and war by their governments**. **If the majority** of people **had a democratic voice they would undoubtedly object** to war. But voices are silenced. Thus, **the freedom to express one's views** and to challenge government decisions and **to insist upon political rather than violent solutions, are necessary aspects of democracy which can, and do, avert war.** Government sponsored propaganda in Rwanda, as in former Yugoslavia, succeeded because there weren't the means to challenge it. **One** **has** therefore **to conclude that it is impossible for** a particular **government to wage war in the absence of a compliant media** willing to indulge in government propaganda. This is because **the government needs civilians to fight wars for them and also because the media is needed to re-inforce government policies and intentions at every turn.**

## case

### 1NC – AT: Democracy

#### Objective journalism threatens democracy

Wijnberg 17 Rob Wijnberg, 10-7-2017, "Why objective journalism is a misleading and dangerous illusion", The Correspondent, https://thecorrespondent.com/6138/why-objective-journalism-is-a-misleading-and-dangerous-illusion/157316940-eb6c348e, (The founding editor of The Correspondent. Before founding this platform for unbreaking news, Rob served as the editor-in-chief of NRC.next, the morning edition of NRC Handelsblad, one of Netherlands' premier daily national newspapers. At the age of 27, he was the youngest editor-in-chief in Europe ever to lead a national print newspaper) //Miller

1. There’s no such thing as objectivity Marcel Gelauff says he doesn’t want his editorial team to take a position on the news. Let me be the first to say that, alas, it’s a vain hope. Describing the world with no idea of what’s good or bad, relevant or trivial, true or false is literally impossible. Behind every report, every feature, every news item, lies a worldview rooted in assumptions ontological (what’s real?), epistemological (what’s true?), methodological (how do we find out?), and moral (why does it matter?). Or, to put it in Gelauffian terms, all news comes from a position. Why doesn’t the evening newscast ever lead with crop circles made by UFOs? Because the editorial department takes the position that UFOs don’t exist. Why doesn’t the news ever lead with a delayed train between St. Petersburg and Novosibirsk? Because the editors take the position that a late Russian train doesn’t matter here. Why does the news never open with the biggest, most powerful Dutch company in the world, the oil and gas trader Vitol? Because the editors take the position that Vitol isn’t doing anything wrong. The reverse is true too: why does the news open with a Trump tweet, a bombing in Syria, a domestic policy proposal, chaos at a national transportation hub? Because the editors take the position that statements by a US president, wars in the Middle East, our own leaders’ plans, and travel snafus in our own country matter. And why does the news always call bombings by ISIS “terrorist attacks” and those by Western governments “bombardments”? Because the editors take the position that that’s what they are. Why does the news always frame the growth of the economy as something positive and not as a disaster for the climate, the environment, or the corals in the ocean? Because the editors take the position that economic growth is good. So when an editor claims not to take a position on the news, he or she is making the most basic misrepresentation possible. And it’s also the worst instruction you can give your editorial team. 2. Objectivity is a poor ideal So there’s no such thing as objectivity. But even if there were, journalists would need to steer clear of it. That’s because the word “objectivity” is usually understood in terms of its moral dimension. Journalists are expected to suspend moral judgment. They’re not supposed to say what they think. Yet this has never been an amoral business. On the contrary, journalism is moral through and through. It’s about what we as a society consider important, or should. All journalism, then, begins and ends with ideas about good and evil. The planet getting hotter isn’t news because it’s fact. The planet getting hotter is news because that’s a bad thing. Journalism is moral through and through. It begins and ends with ideas of good and evil If you order journalists to check their moral judgments at the door, one of two things will happen. Either they’ll have no clue what to report on and go home without a story, or they’ll figure it out in the only way possible: by letting others decide. In practice, that means becoming a mouthpiece for the establishment – the people with the power to decide what’s important, trivial, good, or bad. (Or, like the Dutch premier, to define what’s “normal” and what isn’t.) Objective journalism, defined as not taking a position or having an opinion, has become precisely the opposite of what it was originally intended to be. Today, it equates to unquestioningly repeating the opinions of the powerful. By leaving the position-taking to the public, we reduce our task as journalists to issuing press releases on behalf of elites. In short, we fail to fulfill our most basic duty. That brings us to the third and most urgent problem with objectivity. 3. Objectivity threatens democracy News is one of the most important sources of information in a democratic society. Today more than ever, it determines what we know, understand, and think about the world. It influences our voting behavior and how we see other people, cultures, and countries. To a large degree, it even shapes our image of ourselves. Our view of the world is increasingly fueled by half-truths, whole fairytales, and bald-faced lies issuing from the uppermost ranks of global politics, amplified by the loudest yellers in domestic politics, and spread across millions of phones, laptops, and TVs in milliseconds. Today it’s more crucial than ever that journalism stand for something. We must commit to the values that are essential to a democratic society: to a check on power, to the pursuit of truth, to providing context and perspective. When the president of the United States fabricates the number of attendees at his inauguration and then lashes out at every media organization that presents the evidence to show he’s lying, it’s not enough to report “Trump accuses media despite ample counterevidence,” as the NOS news did. Or to broadcast some even-handed variant that leaves the public in the lurch: “So-and-so reports X number of people, Trump says there were Y. And now over to Philip with the weather.” Instead, you need to clearly announce that one of the world’s most powerful politicians is demonstrably lying yet again. And you’d better figure out why. Meanwhile, you should be keeping track of his actions and not just his words. Otherwise, “not taking a position” means being not only a mouthpiece for power but a conduit for lies.