

Social and cultural anthropology
Standard level
Paper 1

4 May 2023

Zone A morning | **Zone B** afternoon | **Zone C** morning

1 hour 30 minutes

Instructions to candidates

- Do not open this examination paper until instructed to do so.
- Read the passage and answer questions 1 and 2. Choose either question 3 or 4. Answer question 5.
- The maximum mark for this examination paper is **[30 marks]**.

Read the passage.

Passage adapted from Emma Tarlo, 2018. Great Expectations: The role of the wig stylist (*sheitel macher*) in orthodox Jewish salons. *Fashion Theory: Journal of Dress, Body and Culture Special issue on Hair*, 22(6).

This article focuses on the demands and expectations placed upon the *sheitel* (Yiddish term for wig) worn by married orthodox Jewish women based on research in Jewish wig salons in Britain and the United States, and on Jewish online forums.

5 Within orthodox Judaism, the law of head covering is intended to keep a married woman's hair private to all men except her husband and to indicate her marital status, ensuring her modesty. A glamorous *sheitel* that looks realistic and more beautiful than a woman's own hair seems to fail on both counts.

10 The *sheitel* occupies a contested place in contemporary Judaism. Non-orthodox Jews consider head covering unnecessary and indicative of outdated, oppressive patriarchal norms. However, strictly orthodox women consider the *sheitel* insufficiently modest by comparison to head scarves. The *sheitel* first appeared when Jewish women began to follow fashion in sixteenth century Paris.

15 In my ethnographic research in hair salons, many orthodox women said wigs were uncomfortable and restrictive, but seductive since they symbolized an ideal of Jewish womanhood and gave them almost perfect hair. They found head-covering the most difficult commandment to keep, yet worthy precisely because it was so demanding.

The *sheitels* encouraged intense levels of engagement as objects of moral, religious, aesthetic, practical and financial concern. Women placed high expectations on their *sheitels*, and wig stylists [*sheitel machers*] tried to manage these expectations in the context of their hair salons.

20 *Sheitel machers* offer a wide range of services from wig washing, cutting, coloring, etc to education about wig maintenance, psychological support and fashion advice. Gaining access to the hair salons as an outsider was not easy. Initially my enquiries were greeted with caution, but later *sheitel machers* allowed me to spend time in their salons to observe and interact with clients.

25 Rivka, a North London stylist, told me: "We get so much emotion in here – women bursting into tears needing advice and new brides who want their wigs to be perfect straight away. People need to try a wig on and get used to it. But brides get very emotional. You have to prepare them and manage their expectations. If I charged for a therapy session and threw a free haircut in on the side, I would be rich by now!"

30 For young brides, the prospect of covering their hair is met with a mixture of excitement and dread. The wig marks a transitional moment from girlhood to married status. Most brides wear their *sheitels* for the first time either at their wedding or on the morning after their wedding night.

Gali, another North London *sheitel macher*, said that the way a bride feels about wearing a *sheitel* depends both on the levels of religious observance maintained in her family and on the quality of her natural hair:

35 "If you are from a very religious family then there's no question. You know you will wear it [the *sheitel*] But for some it's very hard. If you have stunning hair it feels ridiculous to put a wig on it. These girls want the very best wig possible. It's more difficult for them and there are sometimes tears!"

40 Women wanted wigs that were more beautiful than their own hair, but also to maintain their sense of self. Thus, *sheitel makers* incorporate some of a woman's own hair into her wig. Onat, a Brooklyn *sheitel maker*, comments: "That's my purpose, to help those girls to lift up their confidence by looking gorgeous and modest at the same time and serve God to the fullest in the nicest way".

45 *Sheitel makers* have to respond both to their female clients' needs, and also to the patriarchal politics; women's opinions are subordinated to those of male religious authorities. Rabbis'* opinions are divided over wigs and they issue decrees about them, which have repercussions for everyone involved.

50 Religious dress practices are often interpreted as static forms of social control through which women's sexuality is contained. Far from simply obeying the rulings of rabbis, *sheitel* fashions form part of a woman's multi-layered world of religious and fashion observance. *Sheitels* carry a burden of expectations due to their contested and multivocal role as symbols and material embodiments of religious commitment, status and fashion.

* Rabbi: Jewish religious leader

Answer question 1 **and** question 2.

1. Define the term **gender** and describe how it can be understood and applied in the context of the passage. [4]
2. Analyse the ethnographic data presented in the passage using the concept of **symbolism**. [6]

Answer **either** question 3 **or** question 4.

3. Compare and contrast the way in which the key concept of **power** or **belief and knowledge** is evident in this passage with how it is evident in **one** other ethnographic example you have studied. [10]

OR

4. Compare and contrast the approaches to research adopted by the anthropologist in this passage to the approaches to research used by **one** other anthropologist you have studied. Make reference to concepts and ethnographic material in your answer. [10]

Answer question 5.

5. How are we the same and different from each other? Discuss with reference to **at least two** sources of ethnographic material and examples from the passage. [10]
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