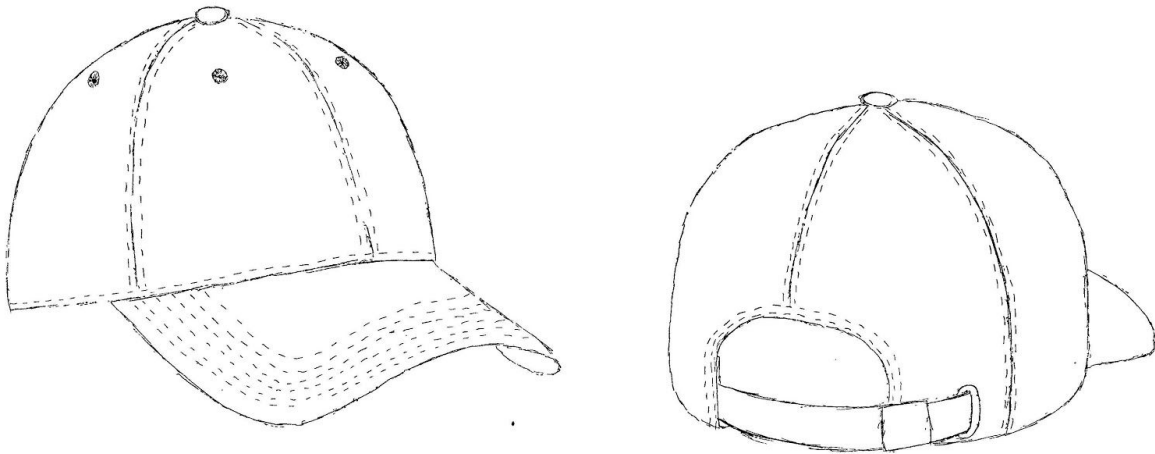


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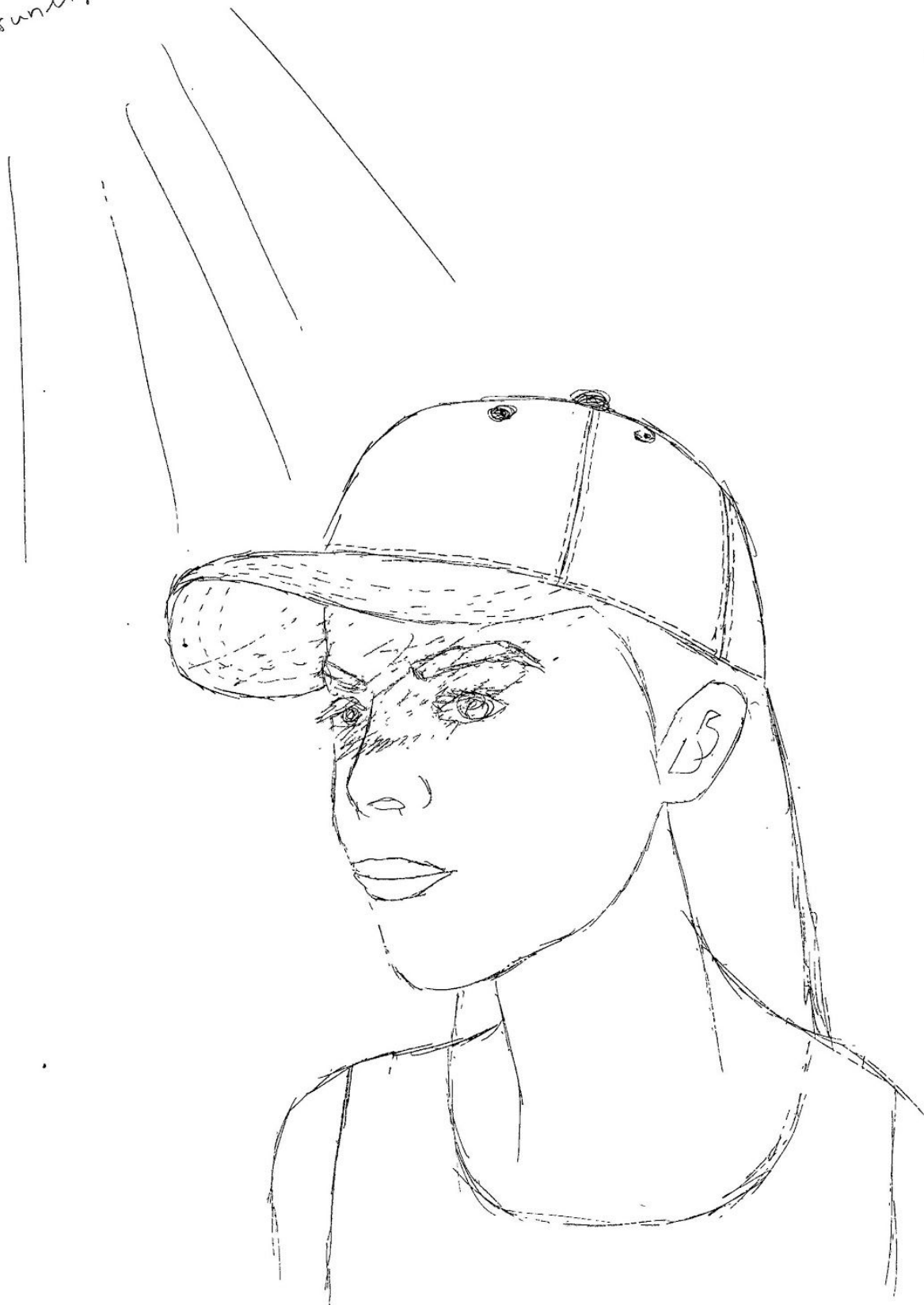
The modern-day baseball cap consists of two main parts: a soft, circular crown and a stiff, slightly curved brim. The baseball cap's design offers both utility and style, making it a common staple in wardrobes across societies.



Like most articles of clothing, baseball hats function to aid a human body part in specific environments. It takes one look at a cap to note its resemblance to a human head, and thus its first clue is that it can be worn on one. Its hollowed-out shape makes it perfect for covering the head, but, once inverted, it also affords more outside-of-the-box functions like scooping and containing smaller items.

If the baseball cap's material affordances aren't clear at a first glance, they are with a little interaction. When worn on the head, the sturdy, opaque brim blocks light from entering the wearer's eyes. Thus, in some extremely bright situations, the hat affords seeing.

(sunlight)



The visible contours in the hat's material show that it is soft and flexible, implying affordances like folding, twisting, and adjusting. A skinny protruding tab at the back of the object simply begs to be pulled, providing a clear cue that the hat can be resized. And though the hat possesses these flexible qualities, the solidity of the cotton shows that it is durable and can offer light protection from precipitation, dirt, and other unwanted environmental debris.

These various affordances are made clear by the physical and material constraints of the object. To start, the baseball cap is constrained in size and shape--it is hollow, semi-spherical, and roughly the size of the human head. The user knows not to put the hat anywhere else on the body (elbows, kneecaps, etc) because it simply does not fit. And while the orientation of the hat is a decision left to the user, the choice is more evident due to a human-related constraint--our eyes are sensitive to light and often require the brim to be worn in the front.

Similarly, the fabric of the hat provides clues to the user that the hat is an item of utility. The woven cotton cannot be torn easily, can be washed and dried, cannot let light through, and can trap heat. It is obvious that the hat serves to cover and protect the head--its material constraints check all the boxes.

How the baseball hat is used depends greatly on the environment. It is meant to prevent damage to the skin and eyes in bright, sunny atmospheres, but it can also protect the hair and face from getting wet on rainy days. In a way, the hat is an object designed to let humans interact with the environment more closely by making all environments more comfortable and livable.

Well, maybe not *all* environments. In the case of a windstorm, for example, a user may opt to leave the house without his favorite baseball cap for fear of it getting blown away. Again, the object is constrained by its lightweight material and tells the user when and when not it is appropriate to wear.

However, the baseball hat has not always been this versatile. While humans have been using available materials to assemble protective head coverings since probably the beginning of their existence, the idea of wearing hats to see better outdoors for athletic purposes didn't become popular until the New York Knickerbockers wore hats in 1849--and they were made of straw. This initial version was heavily constrained by the texture of such a material, and the design quickly evolved into the modern baseball hat we all know now--cotton, compact, and covered in some sort of logo or design.

This brings us to an important note about baseball hats in modern culture. One of the most critical (and yet least related to actual utility) affordances of a baseball cap is its ability to communicate information about the wearer through its logo. This has developed into a cultural constraint that influences how baseball hats are consciously used. What started as a vehicle to for baseball fans to support their favorite teams has turned into full-fledged association and even identification with the message displayed on the front of the hat. Humans now expect hat

wearers to have some relationship to the idea or entity represented on the front of their hat--for example, I wear a hat with Northeastern's logo on it because I go to that school, and I assume those who also wear Northeastern hats attend the school as well. This kind of behavioral pattern marks a world of affordances indirectly related to the logos we see on baseball hats--they can spark conversations, judgements, friendships, and even arguments. Two different baseball hats can stir an unspoken hatred between a Red Sox fan and a Yankees fan simply due to the assumptions we've grown a tendency to make. Such a constraint also determines how we buy and use baseball hats and how our emotional attachments to some hats favor style over utility.

The baseball cap was obviously designed well for how it is used. Each structural component provides natural, visible, tangible instruction as to how the hat can serve the human from a functional standpoint. However, some of the more subliminal, cultural implications let us appreciate the baseball hat for so much more than sheer function and utility.

