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Splitting Hairs?

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I used to think that hair was put on top of our heads in order to protect it from the sun. I could never see any other use for it. I just assumed it was basically decorative, to hide the skull.

To my surprise, however, someone (who obviously has nothing better to do) has begun to analyse the significance of hair colour, hairstyles, and how we fondle the follicles. According to recent research, hair does more than protect us from dust or the sun. It apparently oozes sexual and social connotations. Symbolically situated at the uppermost point of the body, the hair is the limit.

The colour of hair, it seems, transmits anthropological-type data: black hair symbolises strength, passion, and temperament. This may explain the Spaniards' enthusiasm for bullfighting. The Irish have red hair, a condition traditionally associated with sexuality and fieriness, while blond hair denotes pureness, femininity, and youth, but it also hints at fragility, vanity, and even a touch of stupidity. Chestnut-coloured hair suggests balance.

Another dimension to hair is the socio-sexist stereotyping that its length or style can inspire. Short-haired women portray a certain

revolutionary image, whereas their male counterparts achieve the same results by doing the exact opposite. They let their hair run riot. Long-haired women prefer to highlight their femininity, whereas monks and soldiers keep theirs cut short out of discipline and obedience. The pretty pigtail insinuates babyishness and naivety, but buns are out if you want to be in. These repress the libido and are the exact opposite of curls, which transmit the idea of freedom, adventure, strength, and spontaneity.

Touching your hair is no longer a simple affair. For those with a fair helping of hair (usually women), they must be careful of what they do in the company of the opposite sex. If the female sitting at the table next to you in a restaurant touches her hair while observing you, then you are making romantic headway. And if she proceeds to gather it up and expose a naked neck, then you... she likes you. Later on, if the aforementioned female allows you to caress a hair or two, there is no reason why a meaningful relationship cannot start up there and then. Those who hide behind their hair are (surprise, surprise) shy.

The experts on hair language have also advanced a theory on the hairstyles sported by politicians. Those who use gel are not only likely to be cool and calm but may also harbour right-wing tendencies. A typical lefty would, therefore, have long, flowing, disorderly curls. It is all so obvious. The problem with the above interpretations arises when you meet a short-haired hippy, a hairy ultra-conservative, a curly-haired nun, or a hairy monk. It's great to be bald!