

# Hair Style and Life Style

*Paul Rom*

A particular hair style can attract our attention by being either very beautiful or uncommon. In the course of history, the hair styles of people have undergone many changes. This has general sociological reasons but it may also reveal a person's individual life style.

## Historical Illustrations

The old Teutons, for instance, wore the hair long; to have the head shorn was characteristic of their slaves. At the time of Tacitus, the blonde tresses of noble teutonic women were treasures which the conquerors sometimes sent back to Rome so that the blackhaired ladies on the banks of the Tiber could parade a blonde wig.

The complicated wigs worn by members of the ruling class before the time of the Great French Revolution disappeared after this event. The young Goethe, born in 1749, wore a wig with a pigtail—the older man did without it and had Mephistopheles say in his *Faust*, Part One:

Put on the most elaborate curly wig,  
Mount learned stilts, to make yourself look big,  
You still will be the creature that you are.

The time of the late rococo, middle of the 18th Century, is often called “era of the pigtail” (*Zopfzeitalter*). A later poet mockingly spoke of “a sage in days of yore” who “a handsome pigtail wore,” but who “sorrowed much because it hung behind him.” He tried to help this state of things:

Then round and round and out and in,  
All day the puzzled sage did spin  
In vain -it mattered not a pin-  
The pigtail hung behind him.

Here are a few more random illustrations:

It seems that during the Great War short hair was preferred by women going to work in ammunition factories, where long hair might have become dangerous for them. In the twenties, “to bob or to shingle” was the problem of numerous young women.

New members of the French Foreign Legion had their hair cut down to half a millimeter; allegedly to keep them free from lice—in reality to bestow on them a feeling of nothingness. This was later to be replaced by the feeling of pride in belonging to this band of mercenaries. When after their basic military training they felt integrated into this establishment they were allowed to grow their hair again.

After World War II, a New York barber found it profitable to put over his door: "Repair shop for army hair cut." Modern soldiers, too, would have to wear their hair rather short cut.

Early Italian Fascists wore beards. When asked for the reason, they would reply: "Per essere piu terribili," i.e., to appear more frightening!

A lady in her seventies remembers that when in her childhood days men gave up beards, their faces appeared to young women shockingly naked. That was also the time when Wilhelm II, the last German Kaiser, sported a walrus beard, imitated by some and ridiculed by others of his subjects.

In our days, young men and women demonstrate with their long and often wild hair their opposition to the establishment, whose representatives have the old traditional hairdos. Recently, an ex-rebel having returned to the more common hair style, pretended that the young had won the battle, for now a number of dignified gentlemen grow their hair so long as to cover ears and neck. And a teacher claimed that the young people who begin to prefer shorter hairdos have conceded victory to the older generation.

### Interpretation of particular hair styles

A given individual's hair style may remarkably differ from that corresponding to the cultural pattern of his time and place and from that of the group to which he or she belongs as a man, a woman, a worker, an unemployed, a drop-out, a director, a member of the idle rich. This can reveal the guiding line of his personality of which the hairdo is an expression.

Generally one can say that the increasing number of hair stylists for young men seems to indicate that many of them need an artificial aid to win, or to retain, a desired self-esteem. They hide their inferiority feelings instead of compensating them by useful activity. This is also true for the increasing habit of hair tinting and wearing of toupees and wigs. This fact is not only noticeable in both sexes and but also in the older generation. The general sociological background is, of course, our "consumer" society.

In the following cases persons use a peculiar hair style to win an easy feeling of superiority.

At a time when in his country sideburns were not at all fashionable, a young man grew a lovely pair of them. This expressed his guiding fiction: uniqueness. Uniqueness can be real or imaginary and can be acquired on the useful or the useless side of life. That it was the goal of our case could be found by other observations: when sitting together with friends who drank beer, he was the only one who ordered milk. He often pointed out that he was the only one far around who had married a woman from abroad. He also walked about with a *chapeau d'artiste*, bought in Paris, and which was unique in his little town.

Before entering the teaching profession, knowing that he would have to teach classes of "dangerous" girls, he also grew a moustache to assert his prestige.

Having notwithstanding experienced professional difficulties, he underwent an Adlerian life style interpretation and correction. One day, without ado, he shaved off both moustache and sideburns. He had understood that personal uniqueness was not a socially valid self-ideal. Having replaced it by that of usefulness, he gave up these primitive devices.

During the transformation of his life style he also understood another of his tricks to get a feeling of uniqueness: as a freshman at university, he one day suddenly had his formerly parted hair cut quite short. This was a quickly passing period before he grew sideburns. He then pretended not having to comb himself would save time and allow him to work better for revolutionizing the unholy capitalist system. His less neurotic and maybe more efficiently revolutionary comrades did not change their ordinary hairdo. Our case now also remembered that, when he came home nearly hairless, he shocked his unloved step-mother. A particular hairdo may, therefore, be an indication that a person who lacks in self-confidence wishes to appear as what he or she is not in fact. One can call it a superiority complex.

A special hair style can also indicate human distance towards other people, both imposed by others (slaves) and chosen by an individual.

To create a psychological distance between different groups of a society may be the meaning of the Roman Catholic or Eastern rite of admission to the clerical state, namely clipping or shaving the heads of monks or other clerics. They are thus set apart from the laity both by their habit and their hair style.

A young Cretan had been brought up in the strict belief in God as the creator of the universe and man. He became extremely disturbed after a lay teacher had spoken to the class of the theory of evolution. This had demolished the faith of his childhood. As a mature man, he spoke about this event in these moving words:

My disillusion and indignation endured for months. Who knows, perhaps they endure even now. On one side of the abyss stood the ape, on the other the archimandrite. A string was stretched between them over chaos, and I was balancing on this string and advancing in terror. This was a difficult time for me. Vacation had arrived; I shut myself inside the house with a multitude of borrowed books on animals, plants, stars, and remained bent over them night and day like the man who is perishing from thirst and falls face-down by a brook to drink. I did not go outside. I purposely shaved half of my scalp, and when my friends called to have me go for a walk with them, I stuck my head out of the window, pointed to the halfshaved scalp, and said: "Don't you see me? How can I go out in such a state?" Then I threw myself into my studies again, listening with relief to my friends' mocking laughter as they receded into the distance.

This passage is from Nikos Kazantzakis' autobiographical novel *Report to Greco* (Greek Original 1961; translation London: Cassirer/Faber, 1965), a magnificent book, continuing the line on which Rousseau's *Confessions*, Goethe's *Poetry and Truth*, Simenon's *Pedigree* are outstanding works.

In conclusion we can say that a dynamic approach allows us to understand that life style and hair style are determined by the same particular goal. In the first individual case, all the behavior pattern was inspired by a far goal: self-ideal of uniqueness. The young Cretan who shaved his head was motivated by the immediate goal of obtaining a temporary isolation. He wanted to get clear in his mind, without having to give to intruders explanations which they would not be able to grasp. So a hair style can interest not only the sociologist but also the Individual Psychologist.