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CHAPTER 7

Styling Feminism: The View from *Spare Rib*

Angela Smith

'The most important thing I have to say to you today is that hair matters […] Your hair will send significant messages to those around you: what hopes and dreams you have for the world, but more, what hopes and dreams you have for your hair. Pay attention to your hair, because everyone else will.'

> Senator Hillary Clinton, speech to graduating law students Yale College, 2001. (Zernike 2001)

Throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, women's magazines are characterised by their obsession with female appearance, in terms of both editorial content and advertising (see Macdonald 1995, p. 208). *Spare Rib* openly challenged the convention of women's magazines' focus on appearance, but, as this chapter will explore, such challenges could sometimes offer a more positive message in the shape of transformative narratives. Very much part of women's magazines' obsession with appearance is the attention to hair. Female hair is commonly regarded as an essential feature of being feminine. Whether this is body hair which is to be removed or hidden, or scalp

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hair which is regarded as a 'crowning glory', women's hair is open to comment and discussion in ways not shared by other aspects of their appearance. Men's hair, particularly male pattern baldness, is also a cause for comment, but is much less frequently associated with sexuality or otherwise used as a marker to instantly judge in the way Clinton (above) set out in a light-hearted opening address to graduates at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

In make-over shows, the physical transformation of a woman from dowdy duckling to swan (or, in the case of the BBC3 show *Snog Marry Avoid*, from over-preened to made-under), the process that is lingered over most is the 'shopping' experience of purchasing clothes and accessories. However, if we are to take Rachel Moseley's point (2000) that the 'reveal' is the defining feature of such programmes, then this is nearly always the moment in which the new hairstyle is first shown. The participant of such programmes is usually shown touching her hair as if to test whether or not it is real, and then bending and twisting to get a better view of this before moving on to the rest of her appearance. Where a woman's hair is 'thin', in such programmes she will be given hair extensions to make her hair luxuriant and thicker, both being symbolic of femininity and youth. The thinning, greying hair of advancing age is disguised by dyes and extensions to produce a more youthful appearance to match the on-trend outfit the stylist will have sought out. As Patricia Malcolmson (2012, p. 9) points out, hair salons are the place where women go to gain a greater sense of personal confidence and as such, they are more common than grocery shops on most British high streets. And, of course, hair for black women has long been a site of political avowal.

Similarly, hair loss as a result of illness or medical treatment is often one of the most dramatic and indeed traumatic aspects of ill-health that women experience. Many female cancer patients find the loss of their hair to be the 'low point' in their treatment when such a side-effect of chemotherapy is experienced. They comment that this is a loss of femininity on their part, and even in a cash-strapped NHS there are specialist wigmakers who offer 'free' artificial hair products to help ease the trauma. Conversely, the punishment meted out to young women suspected of fraternising with Nazi soldiers in occupied France at the end of the Second World War was most physically demonstrated in the public humiliation of having their hair shaved off.

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As Malcolmson's (2012) discussion attests, there is a long-standing link between a woman's identity and sense of self-confidence and her hair. For women more than men, this is the seen to be the case as women routinely colour their hair to hide greying strands, and spend far more on hair care products that promise volume and sheen (visual markers of youthful vitality). Head hair is thus intrinsically a marker of female youth and vitality, entrenched in the psychological make-up of women as an expression of their identity. For centuries, the tradition was for women to have long hair, with the conventional marker of maturity coming in them pinning their hair up. Any woman with short hair was assumed to have had her hair cut out of necessity, such as through illness, rather than by choice. All of this changed in the immediate post-First World War period. During the war, women had taken on men's jobs in factories and other forms of previously masculine manual work. Long hair had been a cause of injury and even death, particularly in factory accidents, for many years, but in the climate of national crisis, and burgeoning female emancipation, short hair became a health and safety issue as well as marker of gender equality. By the 1920s, the fashionable female hairstyle was the 'bob', popularised by film stars of the time. This trickled down to the respectable poor, and even reached the storyline of otherwise highly conservative children's stories, such as those of Joyce Lankester Brisley. Her Milly-Molly-Mandy stories for young readers include *Further Doings of Milly-Molly-Mandy* (1932). Although written in 1932, this book is one of a series set in a rural England during the 1920s. In the chapter 'Milly-Molly-Mandy gets a surprise', the story centres around the young mother in the narrative considering adopting the fashion for short, bobbed hair. The final straw which drives the otherwise very traditional mother figure to the hairdresser's is the loss of her hair combs whilst walking home on a windy evening. In that story, the potentially rebellious act, whereby we have seen a discussion between Mother and Father in which he seeks to dissuade her from cutting her hair on the grounds he preferred her with longer hair, is mitigated by the fact Father appears with his beard shaved off. As a long-haired child myself, reading a story that highlighted the impracticality of long hair resonated with me and indeed we can see this practicality echoed in Karen Durbin's article from *Spare Rib* under discussion here.

The short, bobbed hairstyle largely fell out of fashion by the late 1920s for all but young girls, with a slightly longer version remaining in vogue right up to the start of the Second World War. Longer hair,

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though, continued to be a marker of femininity and in the 1950s increasingly elaborate hairstyles required such hair for women, complementing the trend of hyperfeminine fashions in clothing. Such fashions were high maintenance and restricting, with echoes of Milly-Molly-Mandy's mother's battles with her hair combs a feature of daily life for many women.

As such, it became a site for Second Wave Feminist debate early on in the feminist movement, as we will see. By exploring an article from one of the earliest editions of the British feminist magazine *Spare Rib*, we will see how the writer's decisions about her hair reflect the anxieties as well as the potential for liberation that the Second Wave Feminist movement espoused, and yet at the same time dispels the myths that have since built up about such feminists being man-hating lesbians (see Heywood 2006, for examples of how widespread such perceptions are). The article, 'A Weight Off My Head', was written by Karen Durbin and appeared in the December 1973 edition at a time when Rosie Boycott was on the editorial board. As observed in the Introduction to the volume, Boycott's editorial stance was closer in content to that of conventional women's magazines with a preference for articles on fashion and beauty. She argued that 'real women did wear make-up and worry about their love-lives' (2009, p. 98). As such, the magazine at this time contains features that have since come either to be forgotten about or overshadowed by the more radically feminist approach of the subsequent collective editorial team. *Spare Rib* magazine was set up in 1972 to act as the voice of women in Britain who were engaging with issues of women's equality but who had found that the existing women's magazines were still entrenched in reproducing the traditional stereotypes that the feminist movement was challenging. In fact, from early on *Spare Rib* often explored articles from other women's magazines and took issue with the underlying misogyny and sexism they exhibited. The overtly political stance of the magazine in this respect is clarified by Marsha Rowe, who commented that 'to overcome women's subordinate position, it is just as necessary to understand and to change these images as it is to change the outwards circumstances of women's lives' (1982, p. 25). In terms of femininity and feminism, she continues that 'this is complicated by the way our society stresses sexual difference, attaching particular value to characteristics which are supposedly either feminine or masculine' (ibid.). This is the function of the Durbin's article under discussion here.

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CDA and Women's Magazines

There is a long-held view by some theorists that femininity is almost entirely a matter of sexualisation, particularly linked to the 'male gaze'. Laura Mulvey's (1975) highly influential writing on the male gaze has been used to explore how women are forced into a gendered identity by feeling it necessary to cultivate feminine characteristics that would make them appealing to men. The 'to-be-looked-at' nature of passive femininity that Mulvey's essay describes may be arguable as an historical record of women in classical Hollywood cinema, but it nevertheless powerfully explains the continuing alignment of white, western, middle class heterofemininity with passivity. In this way, women's self-esteem is inextricably linked to their appearance and desirability. In reviewing the consequences of this, Rosalind Coward explains:

> Most women know to their cost that appearance is perhaps the crucial way by which men form opinions of women. For that reason, feelings about self-image get mixed up with feelings about security and comfort. Self-image in this society is enmeshed with judgements about desirability. And because desirability has been elevated to being the crucial reason for sexual relations, it sometimes appears to women that the whole possibility of being loved and comforted hangs on how their appearance will be received. (1984, p. 78)

Thus desirability is inextricably linked to visual appearance, and thus to self-esteem. However, this does not come without a great deal of effort on the part of the female subject, and as Mary Talbot has pointed out (2010, pp. 137–138), women are complicit in this. She goes on to say that this is 'an everyday aspect of women's lives and through doing it they can hope to establish for themselves acceptable social identities as women' (ibid.). In this way, we can begin to see women as being active creators of their own self-images, and are not simply the sexual objects of the male gaze. This two-fold argument is one that is tackled by Durbin in her *Spare Rib* article and draws on the early Second Wave Feminist debates about the male gaze that Laura Mulvey would address in her 1975 analysis of film, and was expanded on in later work.

The sexualisation argument is one that is very closely linked to Second Wave Feminism. Many of the articles in *Spare Rib* deal with the issue of 'image', and particularly the contradictions between 'doing' and 'being',

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'masculine' and 'feminine', with concerns about the ways women were depicted as being inferior to men in all forms of life. Marsha Rowe, writing in the *Spare Rib Reader* in 1982, comments that these images are a result of patriarchal rule which confines 'women to stereotyped roles, such as the mother who nurtures, the wife who nags, the object of male desire, or the jealous, overbearing mother-in-law' (1982, p. 23). She goes on to place this within the context of the Second Wave Feminist movement's campaigns which had seen 'some breakthroughs during the last ten years' (ibid.), but warns that these are limited and exceptional with much work still to be done. The campaigning thread of *Spare Rib* in tackling these stereotypical images runs through all the issues, with photographer Jo Spence contributing an article to March 1978's edition in which she emits the rallying call: 'What we need to do with our own pictures and with our own self-image if you like is to shift the emphasis back to a point where we understand that everything we do as women has a validity—not just the perfect moments' (*SR* Issue 68, March 1978).

Magazines aimed at female readers have a long history, stretching back to the early days of mass print media in the nineteenth century. Aligned with the rise in consumerism, these magazines acted as shop windows to a world of consumerist practices with women's bodies and homes being targeted as sites in need of constant maintenance and improvement. Magazines are dependent on the revenue earned from advertising, and the most common products in women's magazines relate to 'health and beauty'. They sell what Naomi Klein has referred to as the 'beauty myth' (1990). *Spare Rib* sought to be different and rejected such revenue sources as part of its strategy to empower women to a greater sense of self-worth. On many occasions, the magazine would openly challenge such stereotypical images of women in conventional advertising texts by featuring articles criticising the company and even the publisher that had taken money to display the image (including magazines such as *Marie Claire* and newspapers such as *The Guardian*). Such articles would often be accompanied by witty cartoons parodying the original text under discussion. Thus, *Spare Rib* sought to challenge the conventional images of femininity and the consumerist society that supported these though a combination of political action and humour. Self-image was recognised as being an intrinsic element of female identity, and would be explored in articles such as the one by Karen Durbin under discussion here.

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In *The Beauty Myth* (1991), Naomi Wolf evaluates how far femininity is constructed and indeed regulated by concepts of beauty. The fashion industry, consumer culture, magazines and the media all present ways in which women are expected to style themselves. She explains that from the mid-1960s onwards, magazines adopted a formula:

> [A]n aspirational, individualist, can-do tone that says you should be your best and nothing should get in your way; a focus on personal and sexual relationships that affirms female ambition and erotic appetite; and sexualised images of female models that, though only slightly subtler than those aimed at men, are meant to convey female liberation. But the formula must include an element that contradicts and then undermines the overall prowoman fare: In diet, skin care, and surgery features, it sells women the deadliest version of the beauty myth money can buy. (Wolf 1991, p. 69)

Even in the early, optimistic days of Second Wave, the beauty myth was being sold and packaged to women as emancipatory, as offering choice to modern, savvy and assertive women. Of course, magazines such as *Cosmopolitan* and *Marie Claire* sold a conventional narrative of women who could enter the world of work and achieve independence rather than settling for the domesticity they had promoted in the 1950s, but this was accompanied by an unthreateningly feminine appearance of carefully coiffured hair and neatly tailored clothing. Whilst 'aspirational' on one level, it was far from 'individualistic' in terms of the need to conform to the traditional visual tropes of femininity that focused on the male gaze. This echoes the anti-glamour ethos of early Second Wave Feminist campaigns, most famously the 1968 demonstration at the Miss America pageant which 'symbolically enacted the rejection of oppressive ideals of femininity' (Genz 2009, p. 54) by urging contestants to throw the 'instruments of female torture' into the 'freedom trash can'. Such instruments of female torture includes bras, curlers, false eye lashes, and issues of *Cosmopolitan*. As the 'No More Miss America' (1968) manifesto declared,

> The pageant exercises Thought Control, attempts to sear the image onto our minds, to further make women oppressed and men oppressors; to enslave us all the more in high-heeled, low-status roles; to inculcate false values in young girls; women as beasts of buying; to seduce us to ourselves before our own oppression. (quoted in Unger and Unger 1998, p. 215)

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In the British context, then, what *Spare Rib* sought to do was challenge this version of femininity and present a clearer message about female liberation.

In the post-feminist climate of the early twenty-first century, practices focusing on style and appearance are frequently lauded as sexually empowering: 'the body is presented simultaneously as women's source of power *and* as always already unruly and requiring constant monitoring, surveillance, discipline and remodelling (and consumer spending) in order to conform to ever narrower judgments of female attractiveness' (Gill 2007, p. 255).

We might note, along with Wolf (1991, p. 140), that the content of adverts in ordinary women's magazines, when compared with pornography, reveal very little difference except in the degree of explicitness, and thus women's desires, their self-image, become implicated with male fantasies. Mulvey's 'male gaze' clearly operates in insidious and pervasive ways.

Talbot (1992, 2010) has explored the various textual voices to be found in magazines, showing how the voice of the advertiser is one of the most widespread. She also highlights the 'voice of a friend' as one of the most common features of women's magazines, whereby the copyrighters take up the subject position of a member of the text population. Various critics have referred to the friendly voice of women's magazines as the voice of a sister, or female confident (Leman 1980; McRobbie 1978; Winship 1987). As this friendly relationship between text producer and reader is one between 'participants' who are actually unknown to one another, this is an example of what Norman Fairclough (2001) refers to as 'synthetic personalization'. In his model of synthetic personalization, he suggests there are three facets: an impression of two-way interaction; an informal style linked with positive politeness; the establishment of common ground. We can see evidence of all three elements in the article under discussion in this chapter, and will explore these in more detail shortly. However, the fact that this is a specifically feminine/feminist relationship is one that Talbot has relabelled a 'synthetic sisterhood' (1992). As Wolf has observed, women's magazines 'bring out of the closet women's lust for chat across the barriers of potential jealousy and prejudgment', offering normality testing and inspiration by asking '[w]hat are other women really thinking feeling, experiencing, when the slip away from the gaze and culture of men?' (1991, p. 76).

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A Right to Choose?

The December 1973 edition of *Spare Rib* featured Karin Durbin on the front cover, promoting her article inside the magazine. The cover is noticeably not in the traditional mode of a 'Christmas edition' magazine, featuring as it does a black-and-white image of a back-lit Durbin in an open-necked striped shirt standing against a background of a summer-leafed garden. She is laughing raucously, open-mouthed and with her eyes partly closed. The sun casts a halo around her head as it catches the short-cropped hair that is the focus of her story. This is advertised on the cover as 'HAIR as a political and sexual symbol—why Karen Durbin's happy she's had hers off'.

The cover of this edition thus focuses on Durbin's article, and subsequent edited collections, such as the *Spare Rib Reader* (1982) and the British Library's own selected highlights, to promote the newly-digitised archive, all point to the importance and relevance of this article. It is written in two main styles: a diary format and a first-person narrative. The first-person narrative is usually a personal story, and this is emphasised by the use of the diary format in the first part to indicate confessional or private thoughts and concerns that female readers might share. As with Wolf's suggestion that women's magazines offer a space for women to express themselves away from patriarchal culture, the diary format enhances this impression. It would also suggest that later feminist readings of this magazine are misguided in their assertions that *Spare Rib* did not address its readers as women who are 'obsessed' with their bodies (Macdonald 1995, p. 208, also Genz 2009) .

On the British Library website at the launch of the digitised *Spare Rib* archive, Angela Phillips writes:

> The early editions of *Spare Rib* were full of first person accounts of 'body issues' written with naivety, humour and a freshness and directness that went straight to the heart of our concerns. There was little in terms of feminist academic literature to reference, and most of those who were writing in *Spare Rib* in the earliest days had never read the little that did exist. These were women speaking direct from their experience. They wrote about their breasts and their weight, about clothes and make-up. It was an on-going conversation, which certainly at the beginning, was as much a journey of exploration for writers as for readers. (2015)

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Such first-person narratives are markers of sincerity that are found in other forms of journalistic output such as magazine features. They offer a form of testimonial and thus an insight into the personal thoughts and opinions of the writer. As Phillips suggests here, they are set up as 'conversations' and as such contain the linguistic features Fairclough would describe as contributing to the synthetic personalisation strategies of such texts. The article under discussion here starts with Durbin's 'diary' with entries for 27 and 31 August and then 4 September before slipping into a more conventional first-person narrative. The diary format allows Durbin to engage in a confessional dialogue with herself. For example, in the entry for 4 September, she reflects on images of women with shorn heads, associating them with images of sexual violence to the point that she stops herself mid-list:

> The French girls whose heads were shaved in punishment for sleeping with German soldiers. Lavinia in *Titus Adronicus* after she's been raped and mutilated. Help. What's going on here? It feels sexless to have so little hair. And defiant. As if I'm thumbing my nose at the whole idea of trying to be sexy. It also feels satisfyingly unserious. Motives? Well, I wanted to… But. Withdrawing. Retreating. Making declarations to myself, to R. Punishing myself and him? Oh, but it does feel good. Parting with vanity. End of earth mama/drug queen era. Simpler and not so heavy to look like this. I'm travelling light.

The initial negative list of images reflects the long-held tradition of women with short hair being so styled not out of choice but because of punishment or illness, as mentioned above. Durbin's prose then pauses with the appeal for help. Her mood shifts from this violence to the issue of sexual appeal, then again to empowerment through 'defiance'. This is closely aligned with the Second Wave feminist messages that relate to female image and choice. She also hints at another aspect of Second Wave Feminism which is clear from the pages of *Spare Rib*, but largely forgotten in our re-membering of this area: humour. The narrative moves back into the more conversational style that is typical of the diary format, with question/answer sequences and minor sentences that lack an explicit subject. The narrative spirals around the positives and negatives of short hair, moving on to the first mention of Durbin being in a heterosexual relationship, her partner elliptically referred to as 'R', in the style of a diary but also journalistically to anonymise someone.

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Durbin refers back to the negative associations of short hair as a marker of punishment, here the choice of short hair placing herself in the role of punisher, but implying that short hair is linked to her perceived attractiveness through the male gaze. However, this is immediately countered by the conversational discourse marker of 'oh', and the contrastive 'but' leading away from negativity and back to positivity, which is how this diary entry finishes, with its list of benefits for the short-haired Durbin. Thus, this short diary entry represents the same sort of conflicting associations of short hair that have been the focus for women throughout the twentieth century. It picks up on the themes of Second Wave Feminism: freedom, anti-authoritarianism, rejection of traditional sexualised images of women. It also implies there is humour involved, and that the short-haired woman is comfortably located in a heterosexual relationship. The final sentence of this diary sequence places the subject explicitly back into the narrative, and provides a coherent link to the rest of the article by marking this as the start of a 'journey' rather than the end of the long-haired era of Durbin's life, reflecting the social change that Second Wave Feminism was so much part of.

Durbin's more conventional narrative begins with a list of three 'events' that contribute to her journey.

> It was an eventful summer. A long, complicated love affair came unraveled, leaving me completely on my own for the first time in several years. I quit my secure, well-paid government job to take a chance at the insecure, badly paid hustle of free lance writing. And I got my hair cut off.

The use of dynamic verbs—*unravel, hustle*—to describe the first two events link her personal narrative to the social changes women were experiencing at this time: increasing female independence; new job opportunities: reproductive control through the invention of the contraceptive pill. In the first two cases given here, Durbin claims independence in that she is single and self-employed. The social and political connections between her personal narrative and wider social change are clear. The third item takes us back to the central theme of this feature: female hairstyles. The following paragraph sets up a dialogue with the reader: 'you mightn't think the third item on the list deserves to be up there with the other two, but it does'. By directly addressing the reader through the second-person pronoun, Durbin is also circling back to

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the argument of traditional views of gender relations, challenging these through the contrastive clause. This argument about the importance of hair is then supported by references to the Samson myth (linking this to castration) and, more specifically, to issues of female sexuality with reference to religious practices of female head covering and then the fictional plight of Ibsen's Hedda Gabler. The narrative eventually returns to Durbin's personal biography and deals with the rapid changes in society since the Second World War through a discussion of hairstyles.

Durbin's article is at pains to contextualise her decision to cut her hair short by placing it in a wider social and historical setting. She makes the observation that gender stereotypes were rigidly defined in the 1950s America of her youth, a period she refers to a 'post-war togetherness' that was actually a mask for suppressed sexuality and rigidly defined social identities. She describes her friends and boyfriends as the 'Good Girls and Nice Boys' who were 'well behaved, middle-class children, the future leaders of our country'. The Nice Boys had hairstyles that reflected the military requirement for very short hair—the crew cut. The Good Girls had the 'choice' of short, neat haircuts that had developed from the 1920s onwards as being respectable for women, or else high-maintenance longer hair that needed to be kept in place with excessive amounts of hairspray. This group, which Durbin identifies herself as being a member of through the axiomatic 'of course', contrasts with the 'Bad Boys and Bad Girls', whose hair is more voluminous in the quiffs and curls inspired by a youthful Elvis Presley, or, in the case of the Bad Girls, the 'frowsy' waves of sex symbols such as Jane Russell and Marilyn Monroe. Durbin sets herself up in a group opposed to these Bad Boys and Girls, in identifying them as other ('*we* knew about *them*'), where the hair symbolises a rebellious, sexually liberated subculture. Their sexuality was unnamed and could only be described elliptically as 'It' and by the myth that masturbation would make them blind. In fact, so far removed from this rebellious culture were the in-group Nice Girls and Good Boys, that Durbin regards them as alien in that they 'weren't going to be the future leaders of *their* country', shifting from the '*our* country' of her own group of well-behaved children. This moral and intellectual failing is all linked to their disordered hair.

The dawning of the 1960s is described as fracturing traditional gender stereotypes and 'blurring' the division between good and bad girls. Durbin shifts from an us/them juxtaposition to a more collective experience: 'we were all on the Pill', which is not only a grammatical shift

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but indicative of a moral shift: the 'good girls' were now 'doing It'. The boys shifted their hairstyles from the military cuts of the post-war era to show the influence of pop culture in that they echoed the changing hairstyles of The Beatles. This is coupled with wider social changes brought on through protest and rebelliousness. Durbin also points to another semantic shift, where the meaning of 'long hair' ceased to refer to artistic Europeans and starts to refer almost exclusively to the embodiment of youthful rebelliousness. The long, straight hair that became fashionable for women is described by Durbin as looking 'more natural', but this is ameliorated by the admission that this could be hard work to maintain for anyone whose hair was not naturally in this state to begin with, thus again highlighting the bodily maintenance that is required, irrespective of a woman's political views.

This sense of bodily maintenance continuing to tie young people to older rules of protocol mirrors the resilient sense of inequality in society that the social reforms of the decade were attempting to address. As Durbin writes, this is something that could be performed through 'looser, easier' sexual morality and witnessed through more liberated hairstyles. She comments that, by the dawn of the 1970s, unkempt hair had become the vogue, with the high-maintenance straightening of hair giving way to a genuine, more natural look that liberated curly hair, whether Afro or Isro,[1] and the rise of the 'unisex' hairdresser (and thus inferring liberation in terms of not only genderbut also race). Just as the bob had taken a decade to filter from avant-garde, high fashion in the 1920s, as we saw in the case of the Milly-Molly-Mandy story discussed earlier, the freer, looser hair of the trendy souls of the early 1960s became mainstream as celebrated in the musical *Hair*.

Durbin recounts her own experience of stopping high-maintenance styling as being a result of a specific moment in the mid-1960s when, on a visit to the country, she had been caught in the rain which had rendered her straightened hair 'waist-length instant frizz'. She shifts from referring to this 'mess' as something to be hidden under the scarf, echoing the way she had previously referred to women in certain religious sects conforming to gender expectations by covering their hair to avoid accusations of excessive sexuality, to seeing her hair as something to be celebrated and 'rhapsodised' about by a photographer friend. It is interesting here that she shifts from her own perception of her hair as something to be ashamed of and covered to the views of others, all male, who see it as something to be admired sexually. Durbin becomes the object of the male

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gaze, with the photographer positioning her and making her 'feel like Verouschka' (sic). Verouschka was a famously glamourous model of this period who was well known for her voluminous curly hair, which was usually highlighted by her photographed with back lighting. This image then aligns Durbin with the cool, fashionable people of this period. Notably, this is to the 'grinning' approval of her 'lover', who finds it 'sexy'.

Durbin has shifted from 'boyfriends' to 'lovers' by this stage, reinforcing her links with the Pill-taking young women who had been liberated by gaining some measure of control of their reproductive systems. Durbin's own opinions of her Verouschka-like hair are less clear. The initial sense of liberation from the tyranny of hair styling and the emerging sense of glamour are downplayed with a description of it being 'just wild and wooly', hinting at a rebelliousness that underpins much of her discussion of hair. She likens her appearance to that of 'Earth mama/drug queen', harking back to the diary entry at the start of the article and furthering the links with her as part of the counter-culture of this period. However, the first definite description without the hedging of *thinking* or *feeling*, nor of the views of other people, comes in her description: 'I found it inconvenient'. Thus, we are thrown back to the lack of liberation that this hairstyle affords, with a continuing narrative of hair caught in buttons and car doors, and of taking inconveniently long periods of wash and dry (the half-day drying time implies that, although Durbin is no longer tied to styling in the conventional sense, she is tied to the climate to dry her hair 'naturally' over a longer duration).

This leads to her questioning her choice of hairstyle, framing it not as something to do with vanity but with the feminist movement. She juxtaposes the unisex clothing of jeans, T-shirts and 'sturdy boots' as worn by the 'activist women' she encountered with the 'outrageous heads of hair' that she describes as being 'impractical, inconvenient, downright counterrevolutionary'. The implication is that the women are performing rebelliousness in terms of their clothing, in that they are not confirming to traditional models of femininity, but this is juxtaposed with the same sort of sexy, Verouschka-like hair she herself had. As we find in the make-over shows of the twenty-first century, clothes are only part of the process with hair being the *coup de grâce* of the transformation process. Whilst not the 'nice girls' of their mothers' generation with neatly styled hair, they were nevertheless still conforming to notions of femininity. And the feminist movement, by this point in the early 1970s, was starting to shift in this respect.

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Durbin finishes her article with the narrative of how she finally cuts off her hair. Again, she links this with a wider social world: she is not a part of the avant garde, however, but is part of the socially aware, equality-seeking liberal movement. By the time of writing in the early 1970s, Durbin describes the arrival of shorter hair for both sexes. She refers to the popularisation of the 'shag', which was to become the iconic layered cut of the 1970s through its association with celebrities such as Jane Fonda and David Cassidy. She reflects back on her horror of the prospect of shorter hair coming to emulate the crew cut that she so despaired of on the Nice Boys of her youth, listing the elements: 'Nixon. Apathy. Good girls. Bad girls. And all the rest of that dreck.' Interestingly, by this point Durbin is framing the traditional gender relations of the 1950s as being part of a period of 'apathy', and she includes disgraced President Nixon in this. Such a frame might be seen to be true in certain respects, as this style of hair would have been easier to care for, as explained by one male friend she cites who complains his previous long hair 'was getting a drag to take care of', whilst the shorter style is 'easier'. If we take 'apathy' to mean boredom or laziness, then the easy-care hairstyle could be seen to be emblematic of this. However, Durbin's informant is framed as being one of the liberated young people of her generation in that he is 'an idealistic radical lawyer for the lost causes', thus fighting the system from the inside, and she is therefore able to see this short hair styling as being something that is progressive not regressive.

Durbin's personal decision to cut her hair short is articulated as 'natural and appropriate' for her lifestyle. She aligns herself with the liberated feminists of her generation and cites her hairstyle as being a marker of this. However, she then returns to her opening list of life-changing events from that summer of 1973: the ending of a long-term relationship. She makes the link between feminist style (short hair, blue jeans, comfortable shoes) and her own sexuality:

> And since I'm human (and heterosexual) as well as feminist, I can't pretend it's not important to me to know that I can attract men who attract me. At the same time I enjoyed the freedom from all those hours of washing and untangling and drying, I couldn't help wondering if I'd be sexless without my plumage.

The axiomatic start to this declaration ('being human') rejects the misconception that gender equality equates to man-hating, although she

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does seem to think it necessary to clarify that she is heterosexual by including explicit mention of this in parenthesis. The use of parenthesis is here part of the 'friendly aside' that is typical of women's magazine language (Talbot 2010), and thus contributes to a sense of an implied chat between writer and reader. She emphasises this sense of gender equality in that the male gaze is less powerful: her point is about men whom she finds attractive finding her attractive in return. However, she continues to consider her hair to be a distinctive element of her femininity and sexuality; her 'plumage'. The final paragraph answers this question, reverting to the conversational features that we saw at the start of the article with its use of ellipsis and implied dialogue:

> Fortunately, these questions have a way of answering themselves. There was this party, see, where I met this man… He says I look like a pineapple when I wake up in the morning with my three inches of hair standing up in spikes. But it's okay. Turns out he likes pineapple.

This confessional, conversational end ties up the article in terms of its feminism and heterosexuality. Durbin assures us that she once more has a lover, this being implied by the reported speech of 'He says…' which occurs when she wakes up, thereby indicating they have spent the night together. Whilst the reader might initially think of the pineapple comparison being somehow negative, Durbin responds to this by assuring us that 'he likes pineapple'.

Conclusion

As Dorothy Smith expressed it so depressingly, 'women's bodies are always imperfect. They always need fixing' (1988, p. 47). Even at the height of Second Wave Feminism in 1973, this article by Durbin shows that there was an ongoing debate about physical appearances, both for men and for women, but with women being faced with a particularly uncertain juxtaposition of unisex clothing and hairstyles and their professed heterosexual desires to be attractive. Durbin's 'hair journey' closely echoes the social changes she was living through and is probably one of the main reasons that this article is one of the most cited from all of those that appeared in *Spare Rib*. The fact that it is women's hairstyles that are seen as such a barometer of social change is reflected in the continued importance placed on women's hair as markers of their

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attractiveness as tied as it is to social status, age and morality. Whether this is represented as part of the 'great reveal' on make-over shows or in the obsessive scrutiny of female celebrities' hair for signs of ageing (greyness) or lack of care (e.g., split ends) as they appear in tabloid media. As Durbin shows, the film and pop stars in the 1950s and 1960s influenced the hairstyles of young people, and this rise of celebrity culture continues to this day.

As discussed earlier, hairstyles are associated with age and, in turn, with sexual attractiveness. In women, in particular, this implies to fertility and youthfulness. This underpins much of Durbin's article, with her fears that short hair, although more manageable for her and her lifestyle, would render her sexless and unattractive to men. More than the clothes she wears or the job she does, her hairstyle is more personal and tied to her own identity. Although this echoes social change in the 1960s and 1970s, it still hints that this aspect of female appearance is one that is inextricably linked to self-confidence.

This complex message is articulated in this article by the use of Talbot's synthetic sisterhood, with Durbin appearing as the voice of a friend, the fellow feminist of the magazine's readers. As Marsha Rowe herself acknowledges, the women producing the magazine did not even commit fully to the women's liberation movement until four years into publication (Duarte 2010, p. 3). Durbin weaves her own personal experiences around the wider social and cultural changes of the time, making them accessible and relatable, and thus offering a more nuanced picture of femininity than later representations of emergent Second Wave Feminism would present.

Notes

1. This is the name given to very curly Caucasian hair, now largely fallen out of use.

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