



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

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

48 Similarly, hair loss as a result of illness or medical treatment is often
49 one of the most dramatic and indeed traumatic aspects of ill-health that
50 women experience. Many female cancer patients find the loss of their
51 hair to be the ‘low point’ in their treatment when such a side-effect of
52 chemotherapy is experienced. They comment that this is a loss of femi-
53 ninity on their part, and even in a cash-strapped NHS there are special-
54 ist wigmakers who offer ‘free’ artificial hair products to help ease the
55 trauma. Conversely, the punishment meted out to young women sus-
56 pected of fraternising with Nazi soldiers in occupied France at the end
57 of the Second World War was most physically demonstrated in the public
58 humiliation of having their hair shaved off.



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

95 The short, bobbed hairstyle largely fell out of fashion by the late
96 1920s for all but young girls, with a slightly longer version remaining
97 in vogue right up to the start of the Second World War. Longer hair,



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

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



CDA AND WOMEN'S MAGAZINES

135

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

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

156 Thus desirability is inextricably linked to visual appearance, and thus to
157 self-esteem. However, this does not come without a great deal of effort
158 on the part of the female subject, and as Mary Talbot has pointed out
159 (2010, pp. 137–138), women are complicit in this. She goes on to say
160 that this is 'an everyday aspect of women's lives and through doing it
161 they can hope to establish for themselves acceptable social identities as
162 women' (ibid.). In this way, we can begin to see women as being active
163 creators of their own self-images, and are not simply the sexual objects of
164 the male gaze. This two-fold argument is one that is tackled by Durbin
165 in her *Spare Rib* article and draws on the early Second Wave Feminist
166 debates about the male gaze that Laura Mulvey would address in her
167 1975 analysis of film, and was expanded on in later work.

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



171 ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’, with concerns about the ways women were
172 depicted as being inferior to men in all forms of life. Marsha Rowe, writ-
173 ing in the *Spare Rib Reader* in 1982, comments that these images are
174 a result of patriarchal rule which confines ‘women to stereotyped roles,
175 such as the mother who nurtures, the wife who nags, the object of male
176 desire, or the jealous, overbearing mother-in-law’ (1982, p. 23). She
177 goes on to place this within the context of the Second Wave Feminist
178 movement’s campaigns which had seen ‘some breakthroughs during the
179 last ten years’ (ibid.), but warns that these are limited and exceptional
180 with much work still to be done. The campaigning thread of *Spare Rib*
181 in tackling these stereotypical images runs through all the issues, with
182 photographer Jo Spence contributing an article to March 1978’s edition
183 in which she emits the rallying call: ‘What we need to do with our own
184 pictures and with our own self-image if you like is to shift the emphasis
185 back to a point where we understand that everything we do as women
186 has a validity—not just the perfect moments’ (*SR* Issue 68, March
187 1978).

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



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

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

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

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



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

248 In the post-feminist climate of the early twenty-first century, prac-
249 tices focusing on style and appearance are frequently lauded as sexually
250 empowering: ‘the body is presented simultaneously as women’s source
251 of power *and* as always already unruly and requiring constant monitor-
252 ing, surveillance, discipline and remodelling (and consumer spending) in
253 order to conform to ever narrower judgments of female attractiveness’
254 (Gill 2007, p. 255).

255 We might note, along with Wolf (1991, p. 140), that the content
256 of adverts in ordinary women’s magazines, when compared with por-
257 nography, reveal very little difference except in the degree of explicit-
258 ness, and thus women’s desires, their self-image, become implicated
259 with male fantasies. Mulvey’s ‘male gaze’ clearly operates in insidious
260 and pervasive ways.

261 Talbot (1992, 2010) has explored the various textual voices to be
262 found in magazines, showing how the voice of the advertiser is one
263 of the most widespread. She also highlights the ‘voice of a friend’ as
264 one of the most common features of women’s magazines, whereby
265 the copywriters take up the subject position of a member of the text
266 population. Various critics have referred to the friendly voice of wom-
267 en’s magazines as the voice of a sister, or female confidant (Leman
268 1980; McRobbie 1978; Winship 1987). As this friendly relation-
269 ship between text producer and reader is one between ‘participants’
270 who are actually unknown to one another, this is an example of what
271 Norman Fairclough (2001) refers to as ‘synthetic personalization’.
272 In his model of synthetic personalization, he suggests there are three
273 facets: an impression of two-way interaction; an informal style linked
274 with positive politeness; the establishment of common ground. We
275 can see evidence of all three elements in the article under discussion
276 in this chapter, and will explore these in more detail shortly. However,
277 the fact that this is a specifically feminine/feminist relationship is one
278 that Talbot has relabelled a ‘synthetic sisterhood’ (1992). As Wolf has
279 observed, women’s magazines ‘bring out of the closet women’s lust
280 for chat across the barriers of potential jealousy and prejudgment’,
281 offering normality testing and inspiration by asking ‘[w]hat are other
282 women really thinking feeling, experiencing, when the slip away from
283 the gaze and culture of men?’ (1991, p. 76).



284

A RIGHT TO CHOOSE?

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

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

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

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



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

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

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



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

375 Durbin’s more conventional narrative begins with a list of three
376 ‘events’ that contribute to her journey.

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

381 The use of dynamic verbs—*unravel*, *hustle*—to describe the first two
382 events link her personal narrative to the social changes women were
383 experiencing at this time: increasing female independence; new job
384 opportunities: reproductive control through the invention of the contra-
385 ceptive pill. In the first two cases given here, Durbin claims independ-
386 ence in that she is single and self-employed. The social and political
387 connections between her personal narrative and wider social change are
388 clear. The third item takes us back to the central theme of this feature:
389 female hairstyles. The following paragraph sets up a dialogue with the
390 reader: ‘you mightn’t think the third item on the list deserves to be up
391 there with the other two, but it does’. By directly addressing the reader
392 through the second-person pronoun, Durbin is also circling back to
393



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

402 Durbin's article is at pains to contextualise her decision to cut her
403 hair short by placing it in a wider social and historical setting. She makes
404 the observation that gender stereotypes were rigidly defined in the
405 1950s America of her youth, a period she refers to a 'post-war togeth-
406 erness' that was actually a mask for suppressed sexuality and rigidly
407 defined social identities. She describes her friends and boyfriends as the
408 'Good Girls and Nice Boys' who were 'well behaved, middle-class chil-
409 dren, the future leaders of our country'. The Nice Boys had hairstyles
410 that reflected the military requirement for very short hair—the crew cut.
411 The Good Girls had the 'choice' of short, neat haircuts that had devel-
412 oped from the 1920s onwards as being respectable for women, or else
413 high-maintenance longer hair that needed to be kept in place with exces-
414 sive amounts of hairspray. This group, which Durbin identifies herself as
415 being a member of through the axiomatic 'of course', contrasts with the
416 'Bad Boys and Bad Girls', whose hair is more voluminous in the quiffs
417 and curls inspired by a youthful Elvis Presley, or, in the case of the Bad
418 Girls, the 'frowsy' waves of sex symbols such as Jane Russell and Marilyn
419 Monroe. Durbin sets herself up in a group opposed to these Bad Boys
420 and Girls, in identifying them as other ('*we* knew about *them*'), where
421 the hair symbolises a rebellious, sexually liberated subculture. Their sex-
422 uality was unnamed and could only be described elliptically as 'It' and
423 by the myth that masturbation would make them blind. In fact, so far
424 removed from this rebellious culture were the in-group Nice Girls and
425 Good Boys, that Durbin regards them as alien in that they 'weren't
426 going to be the future leaders of *their* country', shifting from the '*our*
427 country' of her own group of well-behaved children. This moral and
428 intellectual failing is all linked to their disordered hair.

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



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

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

460 Durbin recounts her own experience of stopping high-maintenance
461 styling as being a result of a specific moment in the mid-1960s when, on
462 a visit to the country, she had been caught in the rain which had rendered
463 her straightened hair ‘waist-length instant frizz’. She shifts from refer-
464 ring to this ‘mess’ as something to be hidden under the scarf, echoing
465 the way she had previously referred to women in certain religious sects
466 conforming to gender expectations by covering their hair to avoid accu-
467 sations of excessive sexuality, to seeing her hair as something to be cel-
468 ebrated and ‘rhapsodised’ about by a photographer friend. It is interesting
469 here that she shifts from her own perception of her hair as something to
470 be ashamed of and covered to the views of others, all male, who see it as
471 something to be admired sexually. Durbin becomes the object of the male



472 gaze, with the photographer positioning her and making her ‘feel like
473 Verouschka’ (sic). Verouschka was a famously glamorous model of this
474 period who was well known for her voluminous curly hair, which was usu-
475 ally highlighted by her photographed with back lighting. This image then
476 aligns Durbin with the cool, fashionable people of this period. Notably,
477 this is to the ‘grinning’ approval of her ‘lover’, who finds it ‘sexy’.

478 Durbin has shifted from ‘boyfriends’ to ‘lovers’ by this stage, rein-
479 forcing her links with the Pill-taking young women who had been liber-
480 ated by gaining some measure of control of their reproductive systems.
481 Durbin’s own opinions of her Verouschka-like hair are less clear. The ini-
482 tial sense of liberation from the tyranny of hair styling and the emerging
483 sense of glamour are downplayed with a description of it being ‘just wild
484 and wooly’, hinting at a rebelliousness that underpins much of her dis-
485 cussion of hair. She likens her appearance to that of ‘Earth mama/drug
486 queen’, harking back to the diary entry at the start of the article and fur-
487 thering the links with her as part of the counter-culture of this period.
488 However, the first definite description without the hedging of *thinking*
489 or *feeling*, nor of the views of other people, comes in her description: ‘I
490 found it inconvenient’. Thus, we are thrown back to the lack of libera-
491 tion that this hairstyle affords, with a continuing narrative of hair caught
492 in buttons and car doors, and of taking inconveniently long periods of
493 wash and dry (the half-day drying time implies that, although Durbin is
494 no longer tied to styling in the conventional sense, she is tied to the cli-
495 mate to dry her hair ‘naturally’ over a longer duration).

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



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

534 Durbin’s personal decision to cut her hair short is articulated as ‘nat-
535 ural and appropriate’ for her lifestyle. She aligns herself with the liber-
536 ated feminists of her generation and cites her hairstyle as being a marker
537 of this. However, she then returns to her opening list of life-changing
538 events from that summer of 1973: the ending of a long-term relation-
539 ship. She makes the link between feminist style (short hair, blue jeans,
540 comfortable shoes) and her own sexuality:

541 And since I’m human (and heterosexual) as well as feminist, I can’t pre-
542 tend it’s not important to me to know that I can attract men who attract
543 me. At the same time I enjoyed the freedom from all those hours of wash-
544 ing and untangling and drying, I couldn’t help wondering if I’d be sexless
545 without my plumage.

546 The axiomatic start to this declaration (‘being human’) rejects the mis-
547 conception that gender equality equates to man-hating, although she



548 does seem to think it necessary to clarify that she is heterosexual by
549 including explicit mention of this in parenthesis. The use of parenthesis is
550 here part of the ‘friendly aside’ that is typical of women’s magazine lan-
551 guage (Talbot 2010), and thus contributes to a sense of an implied chat
552 between writer and reader. She emphasises this sense of gender equality
553 in that the male gaze is less powerful: her point is about men whom she
554 finds attractive finding her attractive in return. However, she continues
555 to consider her hair to be a distinctive element of her femininity and sex-
556 uality; her ‘plumage’. The final paragraph answers this question, revert-
557 ing to the conversational features that we saw at the start of the article
558 with its use of ellipsis and implied dialogue:

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

563 This confessional, conversational end ties up the article in terms of its
564 feminism and heterosexuality. Durbin assures us that she once more has
565 a lover, this being implied by the reported speech of ‘He says...’ which
566 occurs when she wakes up, thereby indicating they have spent the night
567 together. Whilst the reader might initially think of the pineapple com-
568 parison being somehow negative, Durbin responds to this by assuring us
569 that ‘he likes pineapple’.

570 CONCLUSION

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



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

590 As discussed earlier, hairstyles are associated with age and, in turn,
591 with sexual attractiveness. In women, in particular, this implies to ferti-
592 lity and youthfulness. This underpins much of Durbin’s article, with her
593 fears that short hair, although more manageable for her and her lifestyle,
594 would render her sexless and unattractive to men. More than the clothes
595 she wears or the job she does, her hairstyle is more personal and tied to
596 her own identity. Although this echoes social change in the 1960s and
597 1970s, it still hints that this aspect of female appearance is one that is
598 inextricably linked to self-confidence.

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

609 NOTES

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

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