

Put Away the Scissors and Flat-Iron: Males Prefer Long, Curly Hair

Hobbs, DA, Daughtrey, MK, and Countrymann, RA

Problem

Evolutionary theory suggests hair length can convey cues of reproductive potential. Women with long, lustrous hair are viewed as more attractive and healthy because they can afford to expend the costly metabolic resources necessary for its maintenance (Mesko & Bereczkei, 2003, 2004). Longer, higher-quality hair has additionally been correlated to youth (Hinsz, Matz, & Patience, 2001). Awareness of the media's influence on perceptions of attraction is also important. Between 1975 and 1995 the weight gap between average women and models increased from 8% to 23% (Kilborne, 1995). This stereotyped ideal vastly contributed to female adolescents' negative body image issues. If models' weight is capable of altering the perception of beauty, then the media's portrayal of hairstyle could possibly affect ratings of attractiveness by males. In the present study we were interested in whether men are more attracted to women with long or short hair and straight or curly hair. Additionally, we hypothesize men's preferences of hair length and style will be congruent to what is popularly portrayed by the media.

Method

Sixty heterosexual males from Austin College were recruited through the psychology participant pool and given extra credit for their participation in the study. Headshots of female college students were digitally altered into picture series, containing short or long hair; females' hairstyles were also altered to be straight or curly in the photographs. These pictures were arranged in a PowerPoint presentation where the participants chose between pairs of faces (long/short or straight/curly) and rated headshots for attractiveness. Afterwards, they indicated their conscious preference for women's hair length and style and specified whether or not media influenced their opinions. Information was also gathered from popular magazines to determine how the media portrays attractiveness through length and hairstyle.

Results

When forced to choose between straight and curly hair, males chose curly hair more frequently than straight hair, $F(1,59)=25.30, p<.05$. This corresponded to their reported preference of curly hair (58.33%). When forced to choose between long and short hair, males chose long hair more frequently than short hair, $F(1,59)=99.73, p<.05$. This was consistent with their reported 92% preference for long hair. Using the paired samples t-test, long curly hair was shown to be significantly more attractive to males than short curly hair, $t(1,57)=-2.27, p<.05$. Overall ratings of attractiveness were higher when the females had long hair rather than short hair, $t(1,57)=-2.40, p<.05$. Qualitative analyses of popular magazines support this trend in preference for long, curly hair over short or straight hair.

Conclusion

Males showed a preference for females with long hair over short hair and curly hair over straight hair. Magazines currently publish more photos of women with long hair, with a higher prevalence of curly styles over straight ones, as opposed to short hair, regardless of hairstyle. Based on evolutionary theory the preference for long hair may suggest youth and vitality. In addition, the preference for curly hair may be due to the media's portrayal of what is attractive.