



Wide World Photos

*A member of the Beatle generation confronts a symbol of the past.*

*Changing teen-age hairstyles apparently caused more than the usual quota of teapot tempests this fall. Even the nation's largest school system had its cause célèbre. When Principal Paul Balser suspended two Forest Hills H. S. seniors who defied his haircut demand, New York City Superintendent Bernard Donovan ordered the boys reinstated. The NYC High School Principals Association got into the act to find out where authority lay, and Donovan told them.*

*In this article, however, Miss Raywid goes beyond questions of authority within the school hierarchy and probes some fundamental education questions. They involve teen-age rights and responsibilities in the growing-up process.*

# THE GREAT

**E**ACH teen-age generation has its own fashions for adorning and amusing itself—and, it seems, for confounding and annoying its elders. Most often it is the girls who parade the reigning adornment; and perhaps it is the switch, with the male barbershop boycott, that has thrown us into The Great Haircut Crisis. Whatever the reasons, “crisis” it clearly is. And we must deal seriously with action taken and contemplated in the face (partly obscured, of course) of this menace. Even now, there are students living under suspension and expulsion from academia. State commissioners of education stalk their chambers on this account, fretting over the final coiffure rulings they must issue. A Virginia boy is recovering slowly from the trauma suffered when a teacher clipped his bangs. And in Georgia, an elderly teen-ager of 19 repines in a cell, after rejecting an offer of a haircut in lieu of prison. Clearly, we are in trouble. Parents are concerned; school officials are worried; and the American Civil Liberties Union is, quite properly, Taking Steps.

What can and should we do about this threat to the Public Weal? Earlier teen-age generations seemed less assertive and easier to control. And besides, a great many of the more extreme fashions rarely plagued school officials. Those who can recall the zoot suits

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# Haircut Crisis of Our Time

By MARY ANNE RAYWID

of several decades ago may also remember that those sporting them were often the dropouts, post-departure. And since this era preceded the Dropout Concern Era, the absence of these characters from classrooms was probably viewed as a solution rather than a problem. (There are adult fashions too, of course—not all of them in dress. Thus today's boon becomes tomorrow's bane, or vice versa.) In any event, the worst that had to be expected from most male adolescents then in school was pegged pants. Onlookers speculated about the contortions probably necessary to donning and discarding the tightly cuffed trousers; but there seemed no cause for alarm, save perhaps among foot specialists.

For schoolwear, the prospective ladies of my youth contented themselves with bulky, over-long sweaters, which some of the more daring wore almost to the knees. But the effect displayed by the less extreme majority merely suggested a mild deformity—a silhouette reminiscent of a barrel, perhaps. Outside of school, however, we affected blue-jeans, and discarded oversized masculine shirts and sweaters. It now seems ironic that the parents of that long-gone day protested the attire as too loose and baggy. But if the effect was less than aesthetically pleasing, it was significant that few of us would have worn it to school. Perhaps instinctively, we were more manageable; but whatever the cause, those costumes which made us such visions of loveliness were largely reserved for family and friends. So whatever the toll on suffering parents, there was relatively little on school officials.

**B**UT times have changed. Today's youngsters boldly stalk school corridors impeded only by the hobbling effects of Granny dresses, or haircuts causing partial blindness.

As we attempt to meet this menace, let us look to solutions already tried. In fact, one recent discussion seemed to suggest that this in itself was a solution: to look to expedients now in operation and tally the preferences. There followed a report on forthright and decisive action in some ten schools. One, for instance, reportedly got matters in hand by promulgating "appropriateness" as the criterion for student garb. Of course, this may strike some as less than adequate—as labeling the question away, or perhaps even as begging it. And if it works at all, it hardly solves the haircut problem of the

boy who must be appropriately tressed for his band job, as well as for his school.

In another school the action reported is more precise and the penalties are similarly specific, at least for the girls: Those whose clothes fail to conform to official standards are promptly sent to sewing classes to alter them. No legal actions filed by parents were reported.

Still another school approaches the question in terms of its myriad educational possibilities; and only the cynical layman might eye the buck-passing aspects of having the student council devise and enforce a code of dress. Only one of the school officials cited failed to perceive The Crisis for the serious matter it is, and commented to the effect, "We kind of ignore it." But this was in the Far West where tradition, at least, has it that men are

*Mary Anne Raywid with son Scott—who she hopes will not opt for long hair.*

Photo by Peter J. Miller



free. Not so in the East, where one school board president is reported to have spurned the chief state school officer's ruling for haircut freedom: Rejecting the notion that schools lack haircut jurisdiction, he simply declared, "We have a right to decide what is right or wrong."

But if the reports on current solutions fail to disclose a final panacea, is there nowhere to turn? One solution implicit in several penetrating discussions of *The Crisis* is an initial diagnosis of the cause of the whole situation. To date, a main difficulty with this approach seems to lie in the tendency toward parenthetical-type diagnosis. That is, the investigators tend to assume the answer instead of seeking it. Thus one investigation opens with the statement that teen-agers throughout the nation are "making a dedicated effort to test just how far they can carry extremes of dressing and grooming." Another writer—an attorney dealing in the main with weighty matters of academic freedom and student political demonstrations—disposes of the whole lot by lumping together the demonstrators and the garb and grooming problems. All, he seems to suggest, are "exhibitionist." (And since all "may constitute distractions which tend to unsettle a proper classroom decorum," he plumps for no nonsense in meeting such aberration.)



Defiance from one side

**G**IVEN such solutions, it would almost seem that there is nothing for it but to think out the whole problem anew. Compared with sampling and choosing, this is surely the rough path, however, for it involves us in issues of principle embedded in both questions and possible answers. And one of the more obvious issues necessarily involved in any answer to *The Crisis* is that of adult control. Just how far should schools and parents go in trying to regulate dress and hairstyle?

Hopefully, parents recurringly ask themselves about the proper limits of attempts to control the tastes and preferences of their offspring. Teachers, certainly, must constantly be asking this question. Is there a *difference* in the responsibilities of parents and educators in this regard? School people seem increasingly to assume that the answer is no; or, perhaps, insofar as it is yes, it is the school which should cast the decisive vote as arbiter for "appropriateness." (See the clothing-alteration story above. And after all, a haircut is for two or more weeks—both in school and out.) There seem to be relatively few parent protests, with most of them just shearing the locks and lowering the hems. The legal questions involved, however—including the right of schools to enforce conformance at the threat of expulsion—remain largely moot.

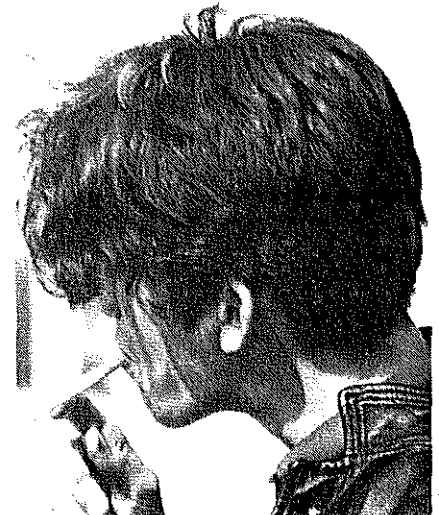
There is a great deal more than legality involved, of course, and teen-age fashions pose tricky problems of principle for the adults having to view them. When it comes to how one shall appear to the world, who ought to make the decision? Seen from the perspective of educators versus parents and/or youngsters, it is a matter of the public versus the private. Is dress one of those factors which, in the collective interest, must be regulated by one or more public institutions? Or is this a sphere which can safely be left to individual choice without seriously jeopardizing the general welfare? The issue is genuine, as our still-growing in-

terdependence brings a spiralling need for regulation in the public interest—and a corresponding decrease in the range of individual choice in various matters. Are clothes and hairstyles of such a type?

We can all produce paradigms calling for interference and non-interference. The "right" of a teen-ager to come to school with vermin-laden clothes and hair should probably be curtailed. This is a fairly clear-cut case of a threat to the general welfare—if not to public health, then at least to majority fastidiousness and a preference for remaining vermin-free. On the other hand, at last count no school had yet decided to outlaw *per se* any costume combining stripes and plaids. An affront to the eye it may be, but most of us would probably leave it as the affronter's right to poor taste. These are acceptable illustrations calling for regulation and no regulation; the problem remains the many in-between situations.

As suggested, the general health and safety of the school population seems a reasonable criterion for regulating student dress. But how about the *individual's* health and safety? Should the unshakeable kid whose forehead mop is giving him skin trouble (and him alone) be subjected to a haircut-or-suspension choice on that account? Prob-

Photos courtesy of Newsday



Defiance from the other side



Photo courtesy of Newsday

*The ouster of five long-haired high school students sparked this demonstration last fall by sympathetic collegians at Oyster Bay High School, Long Island, N.Y. Three of the students watch at right. A fourth is pictured on p. 152.*

ably many would hold that it follows from the broad scope of the school's responsibility for the boy that it would retain such control. But from here on, the problems become even stickier.

**O**BSCENITY can be fitted easily into the general welfare criterion, so that it is not hard to defend the school's right to turn away the young lady who doesn't look the part by virtue of her hem length—or the boy whose trousers, hanging precariously from no hips, are in constant jeopardy. But I can remember my own difficulties in conscientiously enforcing a high school regulation requiring belts. On what justifiable grounds can schools mandate belts for boys who do not need them in order to remain decent? Just the same principle is at issue with the ankle-length Granny dresses, which are anything but immodest. And probably haircut styles and beards (for those who can raise them) are of a similar ilk. In the main, it is hard to show them a risk to health and safety, either public or individual.

The defending arguments for haircut intervention have in the

main pursued two lines. The first is to the effect that the obligation to educate "for life" entails inculcating a sense of the appropriate. This sounds reasonable enough until we look at two impinging facts of life. One is that the adult community seems to lack a unified sense of the appropriate—so that the girl who comes to classes in a Granny dress may have a mother who attends PTA meetings in slacks. The second situation undermining the haircut regulation policy is the difference between educating and controlling. We recognize that in grabbing the toddler out of the street we are sacrificing education to the more immediate need of control. But if it is fairly obvious that this hardly educates him about traffic, are we, then, in any sense "teaching" appropriateness by mandating hair styles? One might even accept the notion that schools ought to teach a sense of the appropriate (assuming we can decide what that is), while rejecting the attachment of such sanctions as suspension. After all, if this is the educational matter some claim, let's treat it as such. And expulsion is

not the normal penalty for failing to learn spelling or history.

A second defense for haircut demands has been the gambit that "inappropriate" garb and/or grooming impedes education. They create an atmosphere, it is argued, where it is impossible to maintain the conditions for efficient teaching and learning. Can this really be true? I confess to considerable skepticism about the role of student dress in discipline. I am sure we can all imagine costumes that would cause momentary sensations in a classroom. But even in such cases, it takes more than the novelty to sustain the distraction. And if it continues, we ought to look not to the original stimulus but to such subsequent and sustaining stimuli as the teacher's reactions and general methods of control.\*

Now it could be said, of course, that any such search as this for principles about haircut regulations is vacuous. According to the school

\*Doubtless every teacher has at some time had a class where his control was so shaky that any boat-rocking whatsoever put everything in jeopardy. The above cannot, of course, hold for such situations. But I would hope that these are rare situations which do not require the stance that without a tight rein on grooming any classroom might at any time go up in smoke.

board member quoted earlier, there is no need for examining and justifying decisions. The power is arbitrary, and so its use can similarly be: The school (or the board) simply has the franchise for deciding right and wrong. But I cannot accept this thinking. Whether or not the courts will sustain the gentleman, such an arbitrary stance is at least as inimical to education as any haircut could ever be, for the simple reason that virtually any order issued in a school carries an educational as well as a regulatory effect. And the educational content of this particular view is something less than fortunate. But even assuming a more tempered tone, can decisions outlawing a hairstyle be *other* than arbitrary? And if they cannot be, then are we not jeopardizing the lessons of a thousand classroom hours devoted to the virtues of sweet reason—in the interests of a prize that's hardly worth the risk?

There are several other messages it is hard to divorce from the apparently arbitrary haircut regulations. One is an unblunted demand for conformity of not just one but two types: a requirement that no one deviate any significant distance from the way others look; and a fiat

calling for that kind of conformity designated as "toeing the mark." As anyone who's been near a teenager knows, the latter sort of demand constitutes waving a red flag. And the more arbitrary and unnecessary the demand, the brighter the banner. The first type, which has been more widely discussed, seems to cancel out several other messages educators work very hard at getting across. As columnist Russell Baker acidly summed it up, "Schools should be less concerned with unorthodox hair lengths and more concerned with why they are turning out so many orthodox minds. . . ." One need not join in the indictment to recognize that the educator's request for bold and independent thought must be somewhat muted by the rider, "but not in dress and grooming."

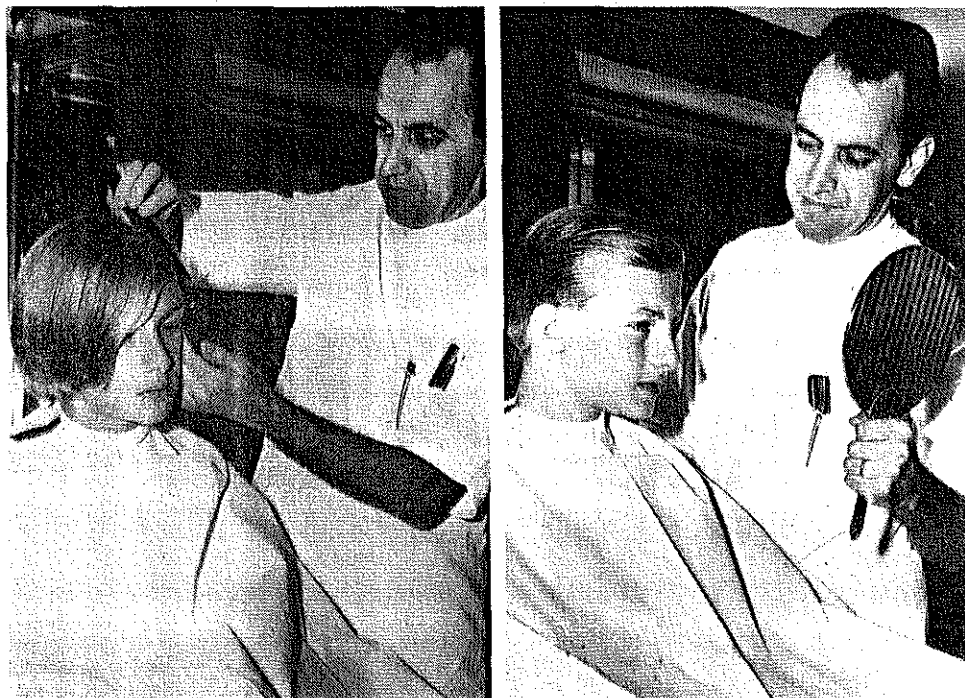
The demand for independent thought is very closely allied to the idea of education in this country, and thus it has been perennial. We constantly harp at learners to think things out for themselves. We don't always want original answers, but we do want them individually arrived at. In contrast, one popular current emphasis in education demands responses that are not only individually produced but are, as

products, unique. This is our drive for creativity. And if we have any way to measure success on this score, it must lie at least in part in the uniqueness of the learner's response. Yet here again, does it make sense to say, "Be creative on canvas or paper or with a musical instrument—but just don't wear it"? When and if schools drop the stress on creativity, the embarrassment of this contradiction won't be such a problem.

But there will still remain another difficulty that is perennial and for generations has complicated the task of dealing with adolescents. This is the "herding" tendency of the age group. Prior to the Organization Man era and its conformity pressures on all ages, adolescence was the clear peak of the human tendency to behave like sheep and blindly pursue the group. If this be true—and such behavior can so obviously prove troublesome to the community—it seems plausible that the proper tack is to do all we can to *counteract* the inclination, rather than buttress and formalize an extended herding sphere.

How could one possibly reply with integrity, and a straight face, to the boy who says this: "You've told me to act on the basis of what

Wide World Photos



A recent Associated Press survey concluded that "youths across the country are being forced to yield their fads as the price of education." The story was illustrated with these photos of Christopher Cywinski, 16, resigning himself to the scissors after being barred from Baltimore's Bel Air Junior High School last year. Christopher is attending Bel Air Senior High this year.

The schools may lose their case for short locks when a youngster can prove his earning capacity is tied to the Beatle cut. Three members of a professional music group called Sound Unlimited recently won reinstatement in the W. W. Samuel High School, Dallas, Tex., when a performer's agent threatened to sue.

But the 18-year-old at the right, Alan T. Miller, settled for education by television last spring when suspended from Unionville (Pa.) High School for refusing to cut his hair. He said he needed long hair because he plays in a rock 'n' roll band. An honor student, he was the only National Merit Scholar in Unionville High.



Wide World Photos

I believe—and I believe it is my right to grow long hair”?

Kids' rights are, of course, very much at issue in *The Crisis*. And the question is not solely that of the public versus the private. It is a matter, too, of the appropriate limits of teen-agers' control over their own appearance. It seems indefensible that by the time of adolescence they do not hold a considerable portion of this control. As one little girl choosing excessive ruffles put it to her mother at the tender age of four: "Look: You're plain and I'm fancy. Why do I have to be like you?"

Granted, many of the haircuts seem like a different matter. But perhaps teen-agers should even command the right to make themselves ugly. And while on the matter of rights, if they are entitled to render themselves less attractive, they should also be free from the indictment that they do so *only* to irk adults! (If we are capable in any degree of contemplating the possibility of tastes at odds with our own, it seems the height of provincialism to impugn the sincerity of adolescent preferences.)

The *Crisis* is a sore test for adult-adolescent relationships. Nevertheless, at least some of the kids—if not all the adults—have been able to keep a sense of humor about it. As one girl commented on the school's ultimatum that either she or her bangs must go, "That cut me deeply." Hopefully, we can weather the situation—and the next *Crisis*, and the next. Some may even dare to speculate as to what form these will take. Frankly, I lack the courage. Whatever, I merely trust that the fashion will be different by the time my son reaches adolescence—because I just detest those damned haircuts.



▼ It is easy to dismiss a controversy over a 15-year-old's [hair style] as trivial. I wish, therefore, to make it very clear that the controversy is not over [this] but over adolescents' right to a reasonable degree of respect, privacy, and freedom to establish their own tastes and govern their own actions in areas where they interfere with no one. It seems to me clear that the regulation of hair styles is an invasion of privacy difficult to justify on educational grounds.

Trivial regulation is more damaging to one's sense of one's own dignity and

to the belief, essential to any democracy, that one does have inalienable rights, than gross regulation is. The real function of petty regulations . . . is to convince youth that it has no rights at all, that anybody is *obligated* to respect, even trivial ones. And this, after all, is what many—I think most—American adults believe. To confirm this, one need only note the widespread and intense hostility against youths who protest against the war in Vietnam in any public way. Those who condemn them seem honestly to feel that it is *impertinent* of the young to presume to criticize the institutions and policies that are costing them their freedom and, in thousands of cases, their lives.

Their critics seldom seem to respect the right of the young to act on their political opinions at all. They ask, instead, "What makes them so rebellious?" implying that the answer must be either Communism or psychopathology. It would be more sensible, under the circumstances, to ask why there are still so few, and what took them so long.

—Edgar Z. Friedenberg, "Ceremonies of Humiliation in School," *Education Digest*, Nov., 1966.

▼ Jerry Spallini, a barber on Madison Avenue in New York City, predicts that "within 10 years men will be wearing bows at the back of their heads and within 20 years they will again be sporting wigs in the fashion of the 18th century." Spallini has barbered for 40 years and considers himself a "hair stylist for men."