

Hair: More Than Your Crowning Glory

by Sandy Dumont

A recent university study validates that your hairstyle dictates the first impression you make, significantly overpowering the impact of facial features.

Dr. Marianne LaFrance, director of the study "First Impressions and Hair Impressions" and professor of psychology at Yale University, confirms that a "Bad Hair Day" affects more than your appearance. It impacts performance, self-esteem, social insecurity, and self-criticism. It is no wonder then that the phrase "Bad Hair Day" has become part of the vernacular for a bad day in general.

Dr. LaFrance asserts that until now there has been no investigation of the unique effect hairstyle has on first impressions. *Tidewater Women*, however, has reported about the importance of hair in this column during the past three years! La France's studies revealed that different hairstyles quickly lead others to 'see' different kinds of people. Thus, the *frame* around the face can significantly alter how a person is seen.

My thirty years' experience suggests that a dated hairdo undermines even the most dynamic "power suit." It is the number one "image killer" of American women today. The most polished and professional hairdos are European looks

that are somewhat straighter, like Katie Couric's new hairstyle. They look uncontrived and classy.

Bangs that curl under are particularly outdated. The straight line that is created by this "sausage" bang is also hard. If you do have bangs, you want stylized straight ones like Laura Bush. If your bangs are currently cut straight across the forehead, let them grow longer at the sides, so that there is a tapered effect. They should not "glue" too much to the head. If you look closely at Laura Bush's hair, you will see that there is a backswept effect which imparts a little lift. This lift is softening and flattering.

Most pageboys look dated, and when they end at the jaw line, they create a hard line that makes the jaws appear somewhat square (see photo). They are also very collegiate looking, so credibility and authority are lowered. The most effective way to update a pageboy is with "pointy layering" a la Couric or Jennifer Aniston. The soft pointy layering allows the hair to hug the face and frame it, softening the jaw line. If you look closely, you will see that Jennifer Aniston has a very prominent jaw line, yet her hairstyle camouflages it completely.

Long, stringy "teenage" hair is often a delight to see, as it resembles a horse's



mane. However, in a professional environment, it immediately diminishes credibility and "presence" because of its "teen" association. On the other hand, long hair to the shoulders with a great cut looks very professional and classy.

If you have curly hair, do not let it grow "wild." More than any other hair style, curly hair needs a precision cut to look businesslike and professional. Also, curly hair that is permed needs a little fluffing in the drying process. Permed hair that dries in the car on the way to work usually hangs limp and looks quite sad.

"Barbie-doll" flips still continue to be popular, but they require hair with lots of body to be carried off successfully. Otherwise, they end up looking messy. Shags can also easily look messy, so update yours by getting a smoother version.

According to Dr. LaFrance's study, we perform below level when experiencing a bad hair day, and we may also feel that we are not as smart as others. Hair is, indeed, more than our Crowning Glory. It can set the pace for the day. ■

Sandy Dumont is executive director of the Impression Strategies Institute. She is an internationally-recognized leader in the field of image psychology and has worked with Fortune 500 companies for more than thirty years. Sandy has also authored e-books and DVDs on the subject of image. Register now for Sandy's upcoming Image Consultant Diploma Course, a two-part series held Dec. 7-11 and Jan. 12-16. For more information, contact Sandy at www.theimagearchitect.com or 757-627-6669.