

How you part your hair may matter.

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Editorials

A humorous look at parting hair, success, and the role appearance can play in success Larry Williams - "This is a headliner. I feel relieved. A hair endorsement. I believe in angels. I'm so overwhelmed. I can't wait to get off the phone. I'm calling my wife on her cell. This is special." But seriously, Larry.

"It's been a tough month or two. My dad died Super Bowl Sunday. He had a great sense of humor and would've enjoyed this. He parted his hair on the left, too." We may not need to hold that mayoral election after all. A leadership theory holds that only one candidate has the primary qualification. And the new mayor of St. Petersburg is . . . Larry Williams.

(stunned silence)

Wait a minute. How can anyone know that Williams will be mayor? The primary election won't be held until Feb. 27. And even in Florida, you can't louse up an election that hasn't happened yet. Still, Williams may have an edge, and it has nothing to do with his personality, his politics or his positions on local issues.

It's his part. Of the nine candidates for mayor, he's the only one who parts his hair on the left.

(more stunned silence)

Okay. He also wears glasses. And he's a Virgo. How could something as mundane as the part in his hair have any bearing on an election?

This brings us to Catherine Walter and her brother John.

For the past 20 years, the Walters have been collecting data and trying to advance their theory that how we part our hair goes a long way to determining how others perceive us and how successful we'll be in life, in business -- and in politics.

The Walters contend that people who part their hair on the right emphasize the right side of their brains and tend to be sensitive, compassionate and good listeners. Those who take it to the left are generally more aggressive and assertive. Type A personalities. This idea was explored in a recent article in the New Yorker.

The Walters, who live in New York City, point out that of the 44 men who've been elected president of the United States, only three -- James Buchanan, Warren Harding and Ronald Reagan -- parted their hair on the right. The Walters sent their findings to Al Gore last summer. As a courtesy. Gore ignored them and continued to part his hair on the right. Bad move. He lost to leftie George W. Bush.

"We did try to warn him," Catherine Walter explained by phone recently. "It's sort of sad he didn't listen."

Imagine how Gore feels. A 49-cent comb cost him the presidency.

Catherine Walter is a cultural anthropologist, and John is a nuclear physicist and mathematician. Of course, given those backgrounds, they decided to open a mirror store in Manhattan. "John thought of the theory when he was in college," Catherine said. "He changed his part from the right to the left, and his peers immediately began treating him differently. He spent years trying to talk to people about it, and they just laughed.

"I didn't get involved until 1997, and at first, I thought, 'Oh, yeah. Sure.' But I have the correct

training to look into it, and I found the statistics back this up." In 1998, she looked at photographs of every current member of Congress and the governors of all 50 states. "It's very difficult to get into office with a right part," she said. "Right parts are about 14 percent across the board."

The part theory applies equally to men and women. Margaret Thatcher and Hillary Clinton both have left parts. "And very few women in Congress have right parts," Walter said. "You don't look at a very feminine woman and think she could lead us."

(Unless it's Sandra Bullock.)

The key here is that changing the part in your hair doesn't change you, at least not dramatically. But it can change the way others perceive you. "It's very subtle, and it happens on a subconscious level," Walter explained. "And there are a lot of things, like your eyes, for instance, that go into the immediate assessment of a person. "All of this happens very fast. Three seconds after we glance at someone we've just met, we've decided everything we know about them.

That's a survival instinct."

What about men who are . . . follicle challenged? Or people who have no part? Or who part their hair down the middle? How do you read them? By the bumps on their head?

"If their hair isn't parted, or they don't have any, that takes that item out of the equation," Walter answered. "Having no part also presents a more balanced thought process." So Moe Howard may have been a genius.

It's not as if the Walters aren't reaching people. In 1979, then-President Jimmy Carter switched his part from right to left after they urged him to (though he never acknowledged the connection). "A Shift at the Top: President Changes Hair Style, Triggers Speculation" read the headline in the Washington Post. It could be easily argued that Carter accomplished more after he left office. Or maybe we just think he did. "He has been the same person his whole life," Walter said. "It's just that we perceive him differently."

Which brings us back to Larry "Lefty" Williams.

"People are usually voting for someone they don't know personally," Walters said, "and many times, they make their choice based on what the person looks like. Or they like the name. Based on our research, I'd have to think Larry Williams has a good chance of winning."

Before Williams supporters run out and celebrate, they may want to consider this:

The Walters also cite Superman as an example of how their theory works. In the 1978 movie starring Christopher Reeve, nerdy Clark Kent had a right part. But Superman wore a left part. So what do Williams and his opponents say about all this?

Patrick Bailey

"I've actually heard of the theory, but I really haven't seriously thought about it. I have a natural part on the right. I've tried parting it on the left, but it won't stay. But my personality is that of a left-part person. I'm a calm person by nature, but very forceful when it comes to issues I feel strongly about." So you're a leftie trapped in a rightie's body? "Yes."

Rick Baker

"I have a related theory. My wife's father was bald. He used to say that men who were bald in the front are the thinkers and those who were bald in the back are the lovers. If they're bald all over they think they're lovers." (Rimshot.) "I have a right part, but when I look in the mirror, it appears my hair is parted on the left." Although Baker places no stock in the part theory, "I do buy into the theory that tall men are more successful than shorter men. That's because I'm 6 feet

7."

Ronnie Beck

"I don't buy it because I don't believe in pseudo-science, mysticism or magic as a way of life. I'm comfortable with my hair parted on the right. It doesn't look as good from the other side. If someone parts their hair in the middle, does that mean they can't make up their mind?"

Kathleen Ford

"Right now, my hair is parted on the right. I think there would be some folks who would disagree with the analysis (of right part people). On the other hand, that's how I perceive myself. I have to force myself to speak out loud. My natural inclination is to sit back and listen. But I've been a nurse and an attorney, and we're problem solvers. We use the left side of our brain. "Sometimes, it's a function of whether your hair is thinning."

Louis Miceli

"I part it down the middle, but 99 percent of the time, I just don't even bother combing it. I use more of the left side of my brain. I'm a borderline psychic. I can sense things other people don't sense. I can see things in my dreams before they happen." What he sees for himself doesn't look good. "They way I look, you wouldn't vote for me. I'm just an average person. I know I'm not going to win."

Karl Nurse

"I part it front to back. That means I'm contrary, I guess. Or that I'm afraid of the fact I'm going bald. It's a bizarre theory. I doubt there's a connection, but there could be. "Guess who I part my hair like? Bill Clinton. I recognize the man has the morals of a snake, so I wouldn't put too much stock in the theory. I don't cheat on my wife. "But it helps that I'm the best-looking candidate."

Maria Scruggs-Weston

"I don't part it. I'm neutral. Balanced. To be honest, that's certainly characteristic of my personality. I have strong positions, but I try to analyze most themes."

Omali Yeshitela

"I think it might be plausible, but I think because most people are right-handed, they would naturally part their hair on the left. I don't part my hair, but I can understand the important of appearance. What happens is initially, that's how everybody makes judgments. There's an old saying about first appearances being everything. But there's another old saying that you can't judge a book by its cover. I don't know how many of us get into trouble judging people based on appearance. But that's what people do initially, and why it would be good to have a process so that folks could get beyond the 30-second sound bites and make judgments based on something else besides appearance."

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