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### Learn the True and Ethical Cost of Wearing Hair Extensions

Hair extensions can give you a beautiful head of hair. However, some ethical questions surround the procurement of hair used to create them.

Hair extensions are a relatively simple way to add volume to thinning hair, cover small bald spots or add inches to your hair with amazing results. However, some negativity surrounding hair extensions has surfaced in recent years regarding the unethical origin of human hair used in some hair extensions.

"Any hair that is willingly given is ethical. Hair that is taken from people against their will or without knowing the reason behind it, I consider to be unethical," explains Ron King, L'Oreal Professionnel stylist and spokesman, owner of Bo Salon in Austin and creator of Invisi-Tab Hair Extensions.

Is the hair in your hair extensions harvested ethically?

In 2004, the deputy director of Moscow's Center for Prison Reform reported that wardens were shaving prisoners heads and selling the hair to earn extra money. And the practice isn't just reserved for prisons. Over the past decade, several stories have circulated about hair being taken from asylum patients, from children and even from the dead.

In Hindu society, many men, women and children sacrifice their hair in the tonsuring process at least once in their lives as an offering to the deities. Tonsure in the Hindu culture serves multiple purposes in various ceremonies as a symbol to show one's love for the gods. In some temples, visitors shave their heads in or nearby the temple of the god they are visiting. It's oftentimes used to show that the person is washing away his or her past sins and starting anew. To the donors, this is a very holy event where they give thanks or ask for a blessing. What happens to the hair next, however, can be considered unethical. The cut hair is collected at temples, sold to hair brokers and then exported to hair extension distributors in the United States and Europe.

In some instances, it can be argued that this type of hair procurement is not entirely unethical. Several hair extension companies secure their hair through the tonsuring process but then funnel a portion of the money back to the temples and into the communities to fund hospitals, orphanages, schools and other charities. Nevertheless, there should be some social responsibility and transparency in the process. After all, the people donated hair in honor of their god -- they didn't donate it to create hair extensions.

Unregulated, untraceable and unethical hair extensions

Many hair dealers throughout the world who collect, bundle, process and resell human hair refuse to discuss where the hair comes from. Whether it's from underage girls in Russia, unknowing women in India or even corpses, it is impossible to know when dealing with unscrupulous people. The working conditions, as well as the cleaning and inspection procedures, of the middleman hair traders also have been called into question. Therefore, some hair extension distributors have cut out the middlemen completely and instead process the hair in-house at their own facilities. These companies use only ethically sourced hair that is traceable.

Many hair extension suppliers have developed ethics policies and guidelines for all their business

practices. They work only with organizations that meet a set of ethical standards to ensure no exploitation or other unethical acts are committed.

"The industry is not regulated," says Elizabeth Cunnane Phillips, a trichologist and hair loss treatments provider in NYC. "Therefore it is imperative to trust your salon and stylist and be confident that they are working with a reputable supplier."

All hair used in hair extensions should be donated willingly, with the donor (or donating organization, such as the temple) receiving a fair and reasonable sum. And though many hair extension companies are adopting ethics policies, reportedly only about 25 percent of the hair imported into the United States is from known ethical sources. Before going to the salon for a headful of extensions, talk to the stylists about what kind of hair extensions they use. Research the distributor and learn more about where and how the hair is procured.

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