

BLONDES

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The blond mountains of France, Marilyn Monroe, blond brownies, Paris Hilton, blond wood flooring, Suzanne Somers.

Surely you didn't think I was going to talk for twenty minutes about mountains, brownies, or flooring. But I am going to talk about blonds. Rather,

Blond (also spelled **blonde**) is a hair color characterized by low levels of a dark pigment. The resultant visible hue depends on various factors, but always has some sort of yellowish color, going from the very pale blond caused by a patchy, scarce distribution of pigment, to reddish "strawberry" blond colors or golden brownish blond colors.

The word *blonde* was first attested in English in 1481 and derives from Old French *blont* and meant "*a colour midway between golden and light chestnut*". It largely replaced the native term *fair*. The French (and thus also the English) word *blond* has two possible origins. Some linguists say it comes from Middle Latin *blundus*, meaning yellow, from Old Frankish *blund* which would relate it to Old English *blonden-feax* meaning *grey-haired*, from *blondan/blandan* meaning *to mix*. Also, Old English *beblonden* meant *dyed* as ancient Germanic warriors were noted for dyeing their hair. However, other linguists who desire a Latin origin for the word say that Middle Latin *blundus* was a vulgar pronunciation of Latin *flavus*, also meaning *yellow*. Most authorities, especially French, attest the Frankish origin. The word was reintroduced into English in the 17th century

from French, and was for some time considered French, hence *blonde* for females/noun and *blond* for males/adjective.

Writers of English often will still distinguish between the masculine *blond* and the feminine *blonde* and, as such, it is one of the few adjectives in English with separate masculine and feminine forms. However, many writers use only one of the spellings without regard to gender, and without a clear majority usage one way or another. The word is also often used as a noun to refer to a woman with blond hair, but some speakers see this usage as sexist and reject it.

The word is also occasionally used, with either spelling, to refer to objects that have a color reminiscent of fair hair. Examples include pale wood and lager beer.

Many sub-categories of blond hair have also been invented to describe someone with blond hair more accurately. Examples include the following:

- **Platinum blond** - Pale blond, nearly white; found naturally almost exclusively in children, but occurring rarely among some adults
- **Ash blond** - usually quite fair, with some ashen (grey) tones
- **Sunny blond** - Very bright, ranging from almost yellow to light yellow.
- **Sandy blond** - similar to sand in color
- **Golden blond** - lighter, with a gold cast
- **Strawberry blond** - reddish blond
- **Bleached blond** - hair made blond artificially by bleaching
- **Zebra blond** - streaked blond and brunette

- **Dirty blond** - a variety of hair color that mixes lighter blonde with some darker browns giving a dark blonde appearance.
- **Brownish blond or dark gold** - darkest shade of blond which sometimes looks light brown and other times dark blond.
- **Pool blond** - Blond tinted with green due to exposure to copper in swimming pools. There are many terms for this form of blond.
- **Honey Blond**- Blond with a honey-colored tint. It can be dark blond or light blond.

Film star blondes such as Marilyn Monroe, Brigitte Bardot, Sharon Stone and Scarlett Johansson are held up as ideals of feminine allure. However, the future of the blonde is uncertain. This is based on a study by unnamed German scientists who had concluded that the natural distribution of fair hair would cease within the span of 200 years, due to the genes associated with fair hair being recessive. However, In October 2002 the New York Times reported that the World Health Organization had no knowledge of this study. The WHO has since officially confirmed that the story is a fake.

Like many popular-culture stereotypes, the origins of the blond concept are murky. The 1925 Anita Loos novel *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes: The Illuminating Diary of a Professional Lady* (later used as source for a film by the same name made by Howard Hawks and starring Marilyn Monroe) featured the character Lorelei Lee, a beautiful but empty-headed singer. Her motto: "A girl with brains ought to do something else with them besides think." While some look to this as the source for the concept, in fact, it might be far older.

Some have suggested that, because Caucasian babies are often born with at least a touch of blonde hair, hence the term “baby blond” to describe light hair, an association has arisen tying those having fair hair with childhood, youth and innocence. Also, as blonde hair is often associated with physical attractiveness and youth, some argue that those around blondes may have a tendency to admire or fawn over them, encouraging some to behave in a child-like manner (consciously or not) in order to gain attention and affection. Babies may be born with blond hair even among groups where adults rarely have blond hair, although such natal hair usually falls out quickly. Blond hair tends to turn darker with age, and many children born blond turn light, medium, or dark brunette before or during their teenage years.

In Medieval Europe, the upper classes tended to be darker haired than the peasantry, likely due to the period tendency to marry within one's own class and the fact that lower class people were far more exposed to sunlight. Blonde hair was, at this time, often associated with commoners, who were therefore deemed less intelligent. Puritans, associating makeup and the dyeing of hair with prostitution, forbade the dyeing or bleaching of hair, creating a subtle cultural taboo on dyed hair that lasted until the 1920s in parts of North America and Europe.

Around the beginning of the twentieth century, Western class stereotypes also led to the negative view of women with dyed blonde hair (or heavy makeup) as being gold diggers, seeking the attentions of men who were already financially well-established, and who were as such likely to already be married. This may have stemmed from the observation that bleached blonde hair (considered to be eye-catching) was a popular choice for the often poor, uneducated women who relied on their looks to make a living, and was

common among actresses, singers, music hall performers, burlesque dancers, chorus girls and bar maids, as well as prostitutes. As women of the time typically did not work after marriage, married women still occupying such positions were rare and almost always of the lower economic classes. One of the only ways a woman might find relief from the need to support herself through such professions was to marry, but wealthy men were likely to find that a wife who had formerly been employed in the entertainment professions would not be accepted well into higher-class social circles. The practice of men beginning affairs with attractive working women which did not culminate in marriage is associated with the adage that "gentlemen may prefer blondes, but they marry brunettes".

It has been suggested that the concept of the 'dumb blonde' may also stem from the idea amongst the ancient Romans and Greeks that Northern Europeans were barbarians and thus less advanced than Southern Europeans.

Lighter hair colors occur naturally in Europeans, and as rare mutation in other ethnic groups. In certain European populations, the occurrence of blond hair is very frequent. The hair color gene MC1R has at least seven variants in Europe and the continent has an unusually wide range of hair and eye shades. Based on recent genetic information carried out at three Japanese universities, the date of the genetic mutation that resulted in blond hair in Europe has been isolated to about 11,000 years ago during the last Ice Age. So, it could be said that cave girls were the first blondes to have fun. Before then, Europeans mostly had darker hair and eyes, which is predominant in the rest of the world.

There is no consensus, but many theories, as to why certain populations in Europe had high incidences of blond hair. Some say that if the changes had occurred by natural selection, they would have taken about 850,000 years, but modern humans, emigrating from Africa, reached Europe only 35,000-40,000 years ago.

Other theories suggest a different form of selection: that early men simply found blond hair more attractive. Canadian anthropologist Peter Frost, under the aegis of University of St Andrews, published a study in March 2006 in the journal *Evolution and Human Behavior* that says blond hair evolved very quickly at the end of the last Ice Age by means of sexual selection. According to the study, the appearance of blond hair and blue eyes in some northern European women made them stand out from their rivals at a time of fierce competition for males made scarce due to long, arduous hunting trips; this hypothesis argues that women with blond hair posed an alternative that helped them mate and thus increased the number of blonds.

Another reason men may have preferred blonde women is that light hair color is a marker of youth - since many Caucasian children have blond hair, but it darkens as they mature, blonde girls or women would appear younger and therefore, more fertile.

A theory propounded in *The History and Geography of Human Genes* (1994), says blond hair became predominant in Europe in about 3000 BC, in the area now known as Lithuania, among the recently arrived Proto-Indo-European settlers, and the trait spread quickly through sexual selection into Scandinavia. As above, the theory assumes that men found women with blond hair more attractive.

“Human hair and eye colour are unusually diverse in northern and eastern Europe (and their) origin over a short span of evolutionary time indicates some kind of selection,” says the study by Peter Frost.

Frost’s theory was supported by Professor John Manning, a specialist in evolutionary psychology at the University of Central Lancashire. “Hair and eye colour tend to be uniform in many parts of the world, but in Europe there is a welter of variants,” he said. “The mate choice explanation now being put forward is, in my mind, close to being correct.”

Frost’s theory is also backed up by a separate scientific analysis of north European genes carried out at three Japanese universities, which has isolated the date of the genetic mutation that resulted in blond hair to about 11,000 years ago.

Instead, Frost attributes the rapid evolution to how they gathered food. In Africa there was less dependence on animals and women were able to collect fruit for themselves. In Europe, by contrast, food gathering was almost exclusively a male hunter’s preserve. The retreating ice sheets left behind a landscape of fertile soil with plenty of grass and moss for herbivorous animals to eat, but few plants edible for humans. Women therefore took on jobs such as building shelters and making clothes while the men went on hunting trips, where the death rate was high. The high death rate “increased the pressures of sexual selection on early European women, one possible outcome being an unusual complex of colour traits.”

Blonde hair is at the highest frequency among the indigenous peoples of Northern and Central Europe. Even though mostly associated with Scandinavia, mostly Sweden, a large

amount of Swedes are not blond, as with the rest of Scandinavia. Blonde people are also found in relatively large numbers in northern Germany, eastern England, northern and eastern parts of France, Poland, the Baltic States and northern parts of European Russia. Due to vast movements of peoples from the 16th to the 20th centuries, large number of blond people are also found in the Americas and Oceania.

In the Americas, blond people are mostly found in the United States, Canada, southern Brazil, Argentina and southern Chile due to English and German immigration.

The Nazi's had a program to create a racially pure "Master Race". Homes were set up by Heinrich Himmler's dreaded SS to care for unmarried pregnant women whose racial characteristics, blond hair, blue eyes, no Jewish ancestry, fit the Nazis' Aryan ideal.

In contemporary popular culture, it is often stereotyped that men find blonde women more attractive than women with other hair colors. Alfred Hitchcock preferred to cast blonde women for major roles in his films as he believed that the audience would suspect them the least, hence the term "Hitchcock blonde". Blonde jokes are a class of derogatory jokes based on a "dumb blonde" stereotype of blonde women being unintelligent, sexually promiscuous, or both. In other parts of modern culture, blonde women are often portrayed as "promiscuous", leading to the stereotype that blondes "have more fun." Jean Harlow (a natural ash blonde) and Marilyn Monroe (pale blond as a child though her hair darkened to brown) were notable bleached blonde sex icons of twentieth-century America, frequently portraying stereotypical dumb blondes in their films.

Two bored casino dealers are waiting at the crap table. A very attractive blonde woman from Alabama arrived....

and bet twenty-thousand dollars (\$20,000) on a single roll of the dice.

She said, 'I hope you don't mind, but I feel much luckier when I play topless.'

With that, she stripped to the waist; rolled the dice; and yelled, 'Come on, baby....

Southern Girl needs new clothes!'

As the dice came to a stop, she jumped up-and-down... and squealed... 'YES!

YES! I WON! I WON!'

She hugged each of the dealers... and then picked up her winnings and her clothes, and quickly departed. The dealers stared at each other dumfounded. Finally, one of them asked, 'What did she roll?'

The other answered, 'I don't know.... I thought you were watching.'

Moral ---

Not all Southerners are stupid.

Not all blondes are dumb.

But, all men..... are men.

As a side note, even "Skeeters" prefer blonds and enjoy sweat and perfume.

As for appearances in popular culture, numerous actresses have played characters labeled as "dumb blondes", famously including Marilyn Monroe, Jean Harlow, Jayne Mansfield, Marie Wilson, Judy Holliday (most notably in her Academy Award winning role in *Born Yesterday*), Suzanne Somers (primarily for her role as Chrissy Snow on *Three's Company*), and Goldie Hawn (for her persona on the variety show *Laugh-In*). The film *Legally Blonde* starring Reese Witherspoon featured the stereotype as a centerpiece of its plot. Country music legend Dolly Parton, aware of this occasional characterization of her, addressed it in her 1967 hit *Dumb Blonde* (though Parton's lyrics challenged the

stereotype, stating "...just because I'm blonde, don't think I'm dumb 'cause this dumb blond ain't nobody's fool..."). Also, saying she was not offended by "all the dumb-blond jokes because I know I'm not dumb. I'm also not blond." More recently, Paris Hilton, Jessica Simpson and Britney Spears have been characterized as dumb blondes due to their public personas, which are portrayed by popular culture as being promiscuous and self-absorbed.

There is a common category of blonde jokes that employ the dumb-blond stereotype for their effect. They usually involve a situation in which a blonde performs a random or dangerous act because she misconstrued the meaning of the words describing the act, to comedic results.

A Blonde goes to Bed Bath & Beyond to buy curtains.

She tells the clerk, 'I would like to buy a pair of pink curtains'.

The clerk assures her that they have a large selection of pink curtains.

She shows her several patterns but the blonde seems to be having a hard time choosing.

Finally she selects a lovely pink floral print.

The clerk then asks what size curtains she needs.

The blonde promptly replies, 'Seventeen inches.'

'Seventeen inches?' asked the clerk. 'That sounds very small. What room are they for?'

The blonde says, 'They aren't for a room. They are for my new computer monitor'.

'The surprised clerk replies, 'But Miss, computers do not need curtains!'

The blonde says, 'Helllllooooooo ... I've got

Windooooows.....

Even after 30 years of feminism, she (the dumb blond) just won't go away.

Jessica Simpson is the latest in the "proud" dumb-blonde tradition: She joins such icons as Jean Harlow, Marilyn Monroe, Suzanne Somers and Anna Nicole Smith. Carol Channing made a career out of playing a dumb blonde. "I didn't have to be bright," she said in an interview in *Ladies Home Journal* in 1955. "All I had to do was be blonde."

Dumb blondes are here to stay.

"It's a stumper why 'dumb blonde' won't go away," says Barnaby Conrad, author of *Martini, Cigar and Blonde*, a series of books about the bachelor good life. "Maybe it's true."

In our post-feminism world, he theorizes, it's "more acceptable to be a ditz blonde."

Even Ph.D.s have studied dumb blondes. A British survey in 1999 found that people rate platinum blondes as less intelligent than their darker-haired counterparts. Tel Aviv's public library and cultural institution, held a symposium on dumb blondes in 2002. And recently, an Australian grad student won a grant — \$17,000 a year for three years — to get to the root of the dumb-blond myth.

The negative image hasn't changed the fact that blonde is the No. 1-selling hair dye. And because only 9% of U.S. women are natural blondes, that's a lot of peroxide.

Maybe there aren't any smart-blond jokes. But we can think of a few smart blondes:

Diane Sawyer, one of the highest paid women in broadcast news.

Reese Witherspoon, the actress has pulled in nearly \$200 million at the box office with her two *Legally Blonde* movies, playing a "dumb blonde" with enough moxie to ace Harvard Law School.

Madonna, the natural brunette used her *Blonde Ambition* to achieve superstardom in the 1980s and '90s. She has kept up with the times by cavorting with a much younger blond pop diva, 21-year-old Britney Spears.

Gwyneth Paltrow, some may question her recent film choices, but the Oscar winner has a thing for playing intellectuals.

Jodie Foster, the onetime child star took a break from Hollywood to major in literature at Yale (she graduated magna cum laude), then returned to map out a quirky path that has earned her respect as an Oscar-winning actress and director.

And of course, all of your spouses, significant others, and my fiancé, who happen to be blondes.

BLONDE POLE DANCER

Sources: From various internet services and web sites