

It seems no one knows enough

"Americans don't know enough about their hair," I once heard some hair-care expert say. That assertion rubbed me the wrong way, though I didn't give it much thought at the time. If I'd thought about it, I might have taken issue with the guy. His point was that in order to make the most of your hair's appearance, you must study its biological properties; learn how it will chemically react to the application of shampoos, conditioners, and creme rinses — all products which he was in the business of selling.

"Now wait a minute," I should have said. "Most of us have done pretty darn well for our hair without any advanced training in biochemistry. Why must we start now?" Anyone who could be so easily persuaded to spend his spare time studying hair care, for the sake of marginal improvements in his appearance, should by all means hit the books. But such a person's hair is probably less in need of attention than the rest of his head.

It's not that I am averse to learning new things. Life itself is an ongoing education process, unless you happen to be watching all-pro wrestling on TV. But according to various experts I have endured, Americans "don't know enough" about their cars, their teeth, music, their lawns, computers, and porpoises. Such attacks are usually directed specifically at Americans, as if the average Australian Bushman could tell you all about how to buy word-processing software.

The scolding gets tiresome. Some people simply refuse to understand why the center of their world is not the center of yours. I heard one man, a musician, boldly proclaim that everyone should play a musical instrument. "Music is good for the soul," he maintained. He should be locked in a room full of non-musicians blowing into bagpipes for about eight hours. After that, you could autopsy his soul.

Granted, occasionally we need to be nudged, or even kicked in the pants, when the significance of some information

what a head injury is." This had the annoying ring of another scolding. But the man went on to say that he is the secretary of the Idaho Head Injury Support Group, and this month is National Head Injury Month. He explained that victims of such injuries often undergo personality changes, or loss of coordination and cognitive abilities. They need the understanding and support of society at large. Public awareness of head injury victims' problems, he hopes, will lead to construction of a rehabilitation clinic in Idaho. This is reasonably useful information.

Similarly, medical information served up in this fashion can be tolerable. To say "Americans don't know enough about cholesterol" is somehow less bothersome than "Americans don't know enough about their hair." That is, unless it's followed by an ad for skim milk or something.

Frequently Americans are accused by medical experts of taking better care of their cars than of their bodies.

You'd think this would at least please the car people. But no, automotive experts are fond of saying things like, "If Americans abused their bodies the way they abuse their cars, nobody would live past 40."

Rarely do we hear that Americans do know enough about any particular subject. Surely there must be a few things about which we know enough. For example, Americans probably know enough about celebrities. We're bombarded with information about where celebrities go, what they do, whom they date, how much money they make, etc. I think it's fair to say that we don't need any more information about celebrities. But nobody ever says, "Americans already know enough about celebrities, so tonight we're going to talk about something else."

Let's face it. Most subjects about which Americans don't know enough are subjects they generally don't care about either. Read any good shampoo bottles lately?