Long Hair throughout the Ages

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Many cultures, religions, and texts have been preoccupied with long hair since ancient times. Long hair is defined in various ways depending on the culture. From a biological perspective, lengthy hair may be associated with good health, nutrition, and reproductive fitness because malnourishment and deficiencies can cause loss of hair. Psychologically, lengthy hair may be a result of natural or sexual selection, as it is a visual symbol of health and beauty.

Aside from the scientific aspects for long hair, many cultures have adopted different views and beliefs. Particularly notable, in Sikhism, allowing one's hair to undergo natural growth represents devotion to god and lack of worldliness [1]. This practice is known as Kesh. In 1699, Guru Gobind Singh Ji explained: "My Sikh shall not use the razor. For him the use of razor shall be as sinful as incest." Similarly, in the Islamic world, Bedouin Muslims traditionally wore long braids, but Western influence has changed attitudes insomuch that punishment for men who transgress includes forced haircuts [2].

Samson, a Nazirite of the Old Testament, possessed immense strength, enough to slay a lion with his bare hands and entire armies with the jawbone of a donkey (Fig. 1a, b). However, once his hair was cut he lost his strength. In Orthodox Judaism, long-growing sidelocks,

which are referred to as payots, and beards are worn by some men based on the interpretation of Leviticus 19:27 which states "You shall not round off the side-growth on your head or destroy the corners of your beard." Although there are some Jewish men who do shave, they allow their facial hair to grow during times of mourning. On the other hand, in the early modern period, Jewish women, by law, were required to shave their hair upon marriage. The goal was to reduce the attractiveness of the married woman to prevent other men from having unholy thoughts. This practice generally faded over time; however, the practice of hair covering after marriage is still common. Some women partially or fully cover their hair with scarfs, hats or wigs after marriage. This is thought to symbolize the departure from maidenhood to womanhood.

Along with growing long hair, cutting or removing hair has also been noted to be prevalent in various religions and cultures. In many religious groups, but most commonly amongst Christians, Hindus, Muslims, and Buddhists, the practice of cutting or shaving some or all hairs of the scalp is a sign of devotion or humility. This practice is referred to as tonsure. Within the Christian religion tonsure was a 1,500-year-old clerical rite marking the preliminary steps on the way to priesthood. There were several different types of tonsures that were based

Fig. 1. **a** Samson Slaying the Lion (1628) by Peter Paul Rubens, Villar Mir Cultural Fund (photo: Teatro Fernán Gómez, in the public domain). **b** Samson and Delilah (1887) by José Echenagusia Errazquin, Bilbao Fine Arts Museum (in the public domain). Delilah cut the hair of sleeping Samson after having been bribed by the Philistines, draining him of his strength.

on various patterns such as clerical, baptismal, and monastic. However, on September 14, 1972, the practice of tonsure was abolished by Pope Paul IV making the practice voluntary. In Hinduism, the rules of the Vedas states that the Chudakarana (tonsuring of hair) should be performed either in the first or the third year of the child, a practice still performed today. In Islam, it is often customary for pilgrims on the Hajj to shave their heads before entering Mecca as a sign of their rejection of vanity and cleanliness. In Buddhism, tonsure involves shaving the head and the face, and is a part of the rite of becoming a monk [3].

In ancient Greece and Rome, long hair in males was identified with wealth and power while slaves typically had shaved heads. Even in mythology, several gods and heroes such as Poseidon and Achilles were described as having lengthy hair. Contrary to current grooming standards of men in battle, Greek soldiers in ancient times kept their hair long because it characterized warriors' aristocracy and power.

Since the late 18th century, bullfighters have worn their hair long in a braid or pigtail and then rolled it with ribbons like a bow. This is referred to as a "moña." This long hair style was thought to be used to protect the nape of their necks. When bullfighters are ready to retire they will "cortarse la coleta" or "cut the pigtail" after their final fight, symbolizing the end of their career. Similarly, in Japanese samurai culture and more recently sumo wrestlers, hair is worn in a chonmage. The traditional chon-

mage consists of a shaved pate with the remaining long hair being oiled and tied into a small queue, which was folded on the top of the head creating a topknot. The original purpose was to hold the samurai's helmet steady during battle; however, through time it became a status symbol among Japanese society. In modern time, sumo wrestlers are the only wearers of the chonmage. The chonmage has gained such importance that cutting the chonmage is the centerpiece of the retirement ceremony of a sumo wrestler.

Native American culture and beliefs vary widely amongst tribes; however, many carry the tradition of growing their hair including both men and women. The reason behind growing out their hair stems from the belief to having ties to the earth and nature. The pattern in which they contain their hair also has symbolism. For example, braiding signifies unity with the infinite and loose hair signifies the free flow of life. Among some tribes, children's hair is cut on their first birthday as a celebration and then never cut again. They will later cut their hair if there is a loss of a loved one, a loss of a relationship, or a loss of part of self. This is an outward symbol of the deep sadness and a physical reminder of their loss. The locks of hair that are cut are treated with respect and are buried, burned, or even placed into a flowering river [4].

Long hair has also been described in literary works, with the most acclaimed work being *Rapunzel*, who had "splendid long hair, as fine as spun gold," assembled by Brothers Grimm in 1812 after being adapted from *Rapun-*

zel by Friedrich Schulz, published in 1790. This story has many similarities to the Persian tale of Rudaba, which was described in *Shahnameh*, an 11th-century epic poem by Ferdowsi. Furthermore, the story of a long-haired girl who is imprisoned has numerous versions and film adaptations.

Today, hair loss restoration is a nearly USD 4 billion industry [5] showing that long, healthy hair continues to be of significant value in our current society as it has been throughout the ages. Not only having the ability to grow long hair, but also being able to cut, reshape, or style one's hair continues to be important when it comes to expression of self, devotion, retirement, or even marriage.

Key Message

Our objective for this article is to provide a commentary on why loss of hair can cause psychological disability in patients, by exploring the history of long hair.

Disclosure Statement

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

Funding Sources

The authors have no funding sources to declare.

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