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# The Case of the Hexed Hair Revisited: A Cross Cultural Intervention One Year Later

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## ABSTRACT

The last volume of the *Clinical Sociology Review* contained an article that presented a planned intervention for an unusual circumstance—the removal of a long-lasting hex. This article provides additional information from the client, an update, and some further reflections from the clinical sociological perspective.

The case of Sophie Koslowski, a woman of Polish and Catholic heritage whose behavior was oriented around a hex placed on her hair, was presented in Volume 6 of the *Clinical Sociology Review* (Freedman, 1988). That article discussed the hexing of her hair by a neighbor, her fear that cutting it would lead to her death, her refusal to cut it for eleven years, and the search for an appropriate healer. The healer, a black minister named Doc Jones,<sup>1</sup> was found and, with appropriate ritual, he cut her hair and buried it in several different places. The treatment approach which removed the hair in a ritual acceptable to the client was successful.

Sophie Koslowski was moved to outpatient services designed for higher functioning clients and began to do piecework at Cedar Industries, the sheltered workshop affiliated with Hutchings Psychiatric Center. She continues to improve and to feel better. She states that she is no longer nervous and “as the buried hexed hair rots, I will continue to get better.” Her hair is now growing at a normal rate as compared with the rapid growth when it was hexed. It is now just shoulder length. Where she previously had worn a waist-length wig to cover her uncut hair, she now seldom wears it—“only for dressing up and not for camouflage.” She wants to be the first Polish blues singer and is studying voice

at a community music school. She continues to work at Cedar Industries doing piecework and is considering trying to get a job in a factory and get off public assistance.

Doc Jones has moved to Florida. He helped her with some physical problems but she no longer needs to rely on his help. Sophie Koslowski's religious practices have changed since the removal of the hex. She only sporadically attends the Polish church in her parish, but instead goes to the large cathedral downtown where "she doesn't have to dress up." Her religion has become more personal and she enjoys listening to one of the Christian radio stations. She says she knows more about God than before the illness. She has moved from a religion-centered belief to one which is more personal and based more directly on the Bible.

Her mother passed away a few months ago—on the 30th day of the month—and Sophie has coped well with it. (She notes that her father died on the 30th, and she herself became seriously ill on the 30th of a month.) After her mother's death, Sophie's sister wanted to sell the family house, but Sophie opposed the sale and it is now vacant.

She reviewed the first article in page proof and, though pleased with the overall account, wanted to provide additional information. That information is based on two lengthy interviews. She proudly shared the original article with Doc Jones, Father Karon, and others who had been instrumental in her support.

Sophie Koslowski recognizes that "some of this stuff sounds downright kookie." Her mother had a strong belief in witchcraft that was not deeply shared by her father. Both Sophie and her mother had been previously hexed, but they were able to overcome the hexes through prayer and the use of religious substances such as holy water. The daughter still maintains the belief that the next-door-neighbor is a witch—a belief that was shared by her mother. The next-door-neighbor does not acknowledge her witchcraft. Sophie now carries a voice-activated tape recorder to try to catch the neighbor in such an admission. When they meet Sophie calls her "jinxer" or "hexer" in Polish (which the neighbor speaks). Apparently the neighbor taunts her back. Whenever branches are broken, window panes removed, or when personal articles disappear or are altered, there is increased sensitivity on Sophie's part to the possibility of witchcraft.

The hex of her hair that lasted eleven years was the third of her hair hexes. She had overcome the other two. She recalls that when she was hexed in 1976 she lit a blessed candle and prayed and got a message through prayer. The message stated that she had two choices in handling the hex: to yell or not to yell. If she did not yell about the hex the illness would take its course. If she did yell, she would come out of this hex and go back to work. Five years later she visited a seer "who predicted that she would go to Hutchings and find Doc Jones and then get well."

## Discussion

Sophie Koslowski's strong belief system is able to adjust to changes in conditions without overthrowing its basic premises. The ending of the eleven-year hair hex is now placed in the perspective of a self-fulfilling prophecy that was established almost from the beginning of the period. It presents the outcome as inevitable, given her "yelling." This rationale stands in contrast to her perspective while still hexed. At that time the hex had power and only certain "safe" aspects of her situation could be revealed to outsiders such as mental health professionals.

She is functioning better since Doc Jones removed the hair hex.<sup>3</sup> Now there is a youthful lightness about her personality which seems to be more than the loss of the heavy weight of her hair. She copes with the challenges of her life without being overwhelmed. She sees a future with singing, with a job doing piecework and without public assistance. Dressed brightly in red, her favorite color which "wards off witchcraft," in fashions more youthful than her mid-forties age, wearing a large cross around her neck, working four days a week at the sheltered workshop, and seeing her outpatient therapist weekly, she skips down her personal yellow brick road to recovery as her buried hair continues to rot.

## NOTES

- 1 All names in connection with this case have been changed to protect the confidentiality of the client.
- 2 For a brief account of the uses of exorcism in psychotherapy, see Southard, (1988).
3. There is a small anthropological literature on the social meanings of hair. See Hallpike, (1986) and Leach, (1985)

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