

1-1-1992

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### Recommended Citation

Koslowski, Sophie and Freedman, Jonathan A. (1992) "Cross Cultural Intervention III: Some Corrections and an Update in The Case of the Hexed Hair," *Clinical Sociology Review*: Vol. 10: Iss. 1, Article 13.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/csr/vol10/iss1/13>

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# Cross Cultural Intervention III: Some Corrections and an Update in The Case of the Hexed Hair

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## ABSTRACT

*This is the third short article about Ms. Koslowski, a woman who overcame an eleven year hex on her hair. It provides an update, corrects some mistakes, and presents an analysis*

## Introduction

This article is the third installment of “The Case of the Hexed Hair.” The first article<sup>2</sup> presented a cross-cultural intervention that showed how specialized cultural beliefs stemming from folk culture were used in the development and implementation of a treatment plan that successfully aided Ms. Koslowski to eliminate an eleven-year hex on her hair, which had not allowed it to be cut. At that time, Ms. Koslowski carried a seven pound, thick, tangled mass of hair, which she concealed under a waist-length wig. The treatment planning included researching the role of white magic within

Polish folk culture in Europe and the United States. The treatment itself required Ms. Koslowski to find and then use the services of a healer to perform the necessary white magic to permit the cutting of her hair. A social worker, a psychiatrist, and I provided supportive therapy. Father Karon, a Catholic parish priest, who received permission from the Monsignor, aided in the locating of Doc Jones, the black healer, and provided religious support throughout the removal of the hex.

The first article on this case was written from my perspective, and used the case to illustrate a clinical sociological cross-cultural perspective. Ms. Koslowski shared the first article with persons who had helped her or who needed to understand her background. However, she felt there were some inaccuracies in the first article and felt it was quite important to set the record straight. We worked together on the second article which corrected some inaccuracies and included an update of her progress. However, the wrong draft of the article was printed in the *Clinical Sociological Review*.<sup>3</sup>

## Part I

I believe (and Jonathan Freedman concurs) that it is quite important that the information in the article about me be correct. The major corrections are:

- My mother did not practice white magic.
- I did not bury anything at the cemetery; Doc Jones did the burying.
- When Doc used the word "sin," he substituted that word for spells, so as not to give glory to the Devil.
- The book with my name on the inside left front cover, I believe, originated at a Black Magic Cult which a friend of the witch attended with a friend of our family. This friend told my mother about the visit to the cult. My mother told the Monsignor about this. He agreed to receive the book and remove my name from it. He held the book until the healer was found. The healer accepted the book and made certain markings in it.
- When I started to collect recipes, it was for my own use in cooking. Then, after acquiring lots of recipes and knowledge about cooking, I planned to write cookbooks. I still plan to do this.
- Easter is the best time to overcome spells, because of the Resurrection of Jesus and His triumph over evil. Christmas Eve is also a good time.

Here are some clarifying additions:

I recall that the night before Thanksgiving in 1976, before the hair appeared hexed and matted, and after I was tipped off by a friend that my

neighbor must be a witch, I put myself in God's hands, thought a simple prayer, and ended the prayer, saying that only God could get me out of this mess. The next afternoon I went into the kitchen and an almost inaudible spiritual voice off to my right said, "yell!" I hesitated and thought to myself that if I yelled people would say that I was crazy. I resisted yelling at first. I then got a message that if I yelled at the witch, I would, after a certain time, get well and go to work. If I didn't yell, the voice said, "this (the witchcraft) would go as it's supposed to." So I yelled. I thought one time would be sufficient, but I realized that I must continue to yell until the fight with the witch was over and the spells were overcome. It seems almost finished now.

In March of 1977, I went to see a psychic who knew that I had hexed hair, even though it was covered with a hat. She gave me Doc Jones' name and told me how to contact him and that he was a man of God. She also told me that my next door neighbor was a witch and a devil and that I would need to give the spell back to the witch. A few days later, I confronted the witch by yelling at her "witch hexer," and telling her she caused the hexed hair. She herself admitted that she caused the hexed hair when she said she was happy that she could do that to me. I replied that she should not be happy because God is not happy and Jesus is not happy. She became silent then. After she gloated, my name-calling became a lot stronger and nastier, to make her unhappy.

Then in the summer of 1988, after the hexed hair was removed, she laughed and said 'a Black' helped you.'" I cut her off. The next day she asked, "How are the Blacks today?" in a mocking tone. I cut her off again. After thinking the situation over for a few days, I asked her how she knew that the healer was black. She said that I had said so. I replied that I had never said he was Black, only that a healer had helped me. She twisted her face and shut up.

Three weeks before my father died, he said, "Is that witch going to kill us all?" He took my mother to a healer in Poland, who removed a spell from her right knee. If she had not gone to the healer, the bones would have come out of the knee. White spots where the bones were supposed to come out of her skin remained for the rest of her life. My father believed, but he kept it more to himself. My mother and I were more active. My mother was treated by a medical doctor in the U.S. for problems with her big toe. He came to believe that the toe was hexed by the witch when bones came out of it.

I still believe that the next door neighbor is a witch. She continues to stare at my house. When she backs out of her driveway, she pulls up to the left curb instead of to the right side of the street, and stares into my

house. There is no reasonable explanation for her to do this, unless she is up to evil. It seems to be some sort of ritual. She does this several times and then stops. I run into problems, especially with my family and tenants, after she does that.

Doc Jones helped me a lot. The witch continues to try tacky stuff, but nothing she has done has deeply affected me, except to cause a lot of inconvenience. She seems to try and get to me each year on the same dates on which she caused me trouble before.

There is a court battle going on with my sister over the ownership of my parents' house, which should be half mine. I took the initiative and sued her after she tried to evict me several times. The case has not yet been settled.

I continue to study music at the community arts school: voice lessons, ensemble singing and some solos: including country-western, easy listening, Polish and religious music. I also study music composition with a private instructor. I have written lyrics in the past and have a few pieces set to music. I still buy glittery clothes for performances. I sang my first-full length solo and duet at the Community Art School Open House and received applause and many compliments.

I will go to the Hutchings' outpatient clinic until I reach a satisfactory conclusion to the witchcraft problem and tie up some loose ends. These visits also concern family issues, especially involving my sister. I work at Cedar Industries, the Hutchings' workshop, doing piecework. I put together at least one thousand cable connectors an hour. It pays over \$8 a thousand. I am almost ready to take a full-time job and to leave the Hutchings mental health system and social services.

I like my hair. It is no longer hexed. It's getting longer and stronger looking. I now wear wigs only when I feel like dressing up, not because I have to.

I never took medication as part of my treatment at Hutchings. I was never an inpatient. I was originally brought to Hutchings after my mother had a stroke and became a mute invalid. Members of my family tried to put me on welfare and wanted to throw me out of the house and take the assets once it was sold. If my mother had not suffered the stroke, I would not have wound up at Hutchings.

I go to Cathedral frequently, and to St. Kasimars on occasion. I am still in touch with the priests who were helpful. I live one day at a time, with a strong faith, trusting God that things will work out for the best. I feel God's protective hand upon me. I believe that dealing with spells and hexes is dealing with the supernatural. The supernatural is hard to understand or prove. For example, healing miracles in Lourdes or Fatima and

divine healing in general are done with the help and grace of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. I believe that I was helped by these forces. Spells and evil miracles are done with the help of Satan, through black cults and Satan's followers.

## **Part II: Discussion**

### **The Quality of Contact between Us**

Please note the shift in Part I of this article. No longer is Sophie Koslowski speaking through me. This part of the article was written in the first person. Although Ms. Koslowski chooses to continue to use the pseudonym, these are her words to describe her concerns and the changes in her life. My function in this part of the article is to try to limit the detail in her story and to act as scribe. She writes well and I have encouraged her to write an autobiography.

I am not sure her words in the first part of the article convey the quality of our interaction. Sophie Koslowski is empowered, perceptive, assertive, articulate and on the move. The power, once in her hair, now flows within her. She has goals and is working hard to achieve them. While she insists strongly on what is important to her, she is open to compromise.

I am no longer a usual therapist, but rather have become one of the persons Sophie Koslowski touches base with, partially as an advice-giver, but more specifically as someone with whom she can share her achievements and problems. This role has developed over time. At the time of the first article, I was part of a three person team, consisting of a primary therapist social worker, a psychologist, and a clinical sociologist which met with Ms. Koslowski to assess progress. Once the formerly-hexed hair was removed, Ms. Koslowski came by, as per the instructions of the healer, to show me the hair. She then began to touch base informally at about three week intervals. Sometimes, it was to show me a new acquisition from the consignment clothing store, sometimes it was to use the copier in the library to copy music, and sometimes to tell me the latest escapade with the witch or her family. This has become an informal role. I am not part of her formal treatment, but the meeting team acknowledges my role. I seldom give advice. Rather, I am a navigational point by which she can check her bearings.

This informal professional role provides a continuity over years, not just for Ms. Koslowski, but for former students, clients, community members,

co-workers, and others. The closest natural metaphor is a long-term casual friendship—one that is available when needed, but which will not escalate. I think my role has developed because I am easy to access, a good listener, accepting of alternative belief systems, and non-judgmental. Many mental health workers play this role for particular clients who choose to touch base with them.

### A Metaphorical Analysis<sup>5</sup>

Ms. Koslowski continues to believe in a world where there is an ongoing battle between Good and Evil, where there is black magic that can be overcome by white magic. This world requires being on one's guard against forces of evil. People can become victimized. The hex became a manifestation of evil, attached to the fertile image of hair—attached yet external to the body. For eleven years, Ms. Koslowski engaged in a battle against the forces of evil and finally through prayer, the aid of a practitioner of white magic, supportive therapy, and the help of Catholic priests, she was able to end the hex. The hair is cut and buried. This is clearly a triumph of good over evil.

During the course of this battle, Ms. Koslowski's parents died. She lost the role of dutiful daughter supporting her immigrant parents. She emerged from the battle reinforced in her commitment to Good. She was able to move through the loss and is slowly taking on more independent roles. She continues contact with those who helped her through the late stages of the battle.

### Implications for Stereotyped Service Delivery

The usual stereotype of how a state hospital delivers psychiatric services consists of patients receiving services and medication against their will, spending months on overcrowded wards, and being stripped of their beliefs and dignity. Ms. Koslowski received treatment in an outpatient clinic, was prescribed no psychotropic medication, and continues with her beliefs intact. What has changed is her own sense of herself. She has won a battle against Evil. She now has the power to withstand the forces of the Devil. She is on the verge of graduating from the mental health service system. What has kept her in the system until now are bureaucratic rules which state that in order to do the piecework at the sheltered workshop, she must be in active treatment.

## Mental Health

Is Ms. Koslowski healthy? She is able to energetically cope with the world she faces. While her belief system might not withstand the rigors of scientific method, there are many throughout the world who frame their understanding in similar dimensions. She has found institutional reinforcement for maintaining this belief system, from her parish and from the mental health system. She is growing and changing, performing publicly as a singer, looking forward to joining the work force and leaving subsidies behind. Some would view her as eccentric because of the way she handles this battle. Some professional therapists would argue that success could come only when this belief system was wiped out to be replaced by one that they accept. Is there a reason to try and change this belief system? The belief system is not pathological. It forms the basis for her behavior. Not everyone in Ms. Koslowski's world is happy with her behavior; not the members of her immediate family nor her next door neighbor, the witch. If universal approval is the goal of mental health treatment, then most of us are in big trouble.

## NOTES

1. All names in connection with this case have been changed to protect the confidentiality of the client.
2. Freedman, J.A., Cross cultural intervention: The case of the hexed hair. *Clinical Sociology Review*, 6, pp. 159-68.
3. Freedman, J.A., The case of the hexed hair revisited: A cross-cultural intervention one year later. *Clinical Sociology Review*, 7, pp. 172-74.
4. She used an insulting slur.
5. See Fein, M.L. (1990). *Role change: a resocialization perspective*. New York: Praeger.