

# Challenging the Norms: Hairless Women in the Finnish Culture and Society

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Hair is an integral part of femininity in Western culture. We all are familiar with the common phrase “a woman’s hair is her crown and glory”. Hair has a high symbolic value.

A bald woman violates the Western norm of beauty and provokes a debate. Historically, women’s baldness has often been seen in a negative light and thus has been associated with radicalism as well as with disease and shame. Shaving head has also been used as a punishment for breaking the rules and norms; a shaved head is still associated with shame and disgrace.

Starting in the 1980s, the number of women who choose to portray themselves publicly without a head full of hair has increased in Finland. At the same time the attitude towards women’s baldness has changed. While in Finland of the 1960s, a publicly bald woman caused a stir, she now in the contemporary society may be perceived as being brave and courageous. Nevertheless, a publicly bald woman still provokes conversation.

In my PhD research I study how women's baldness has been experienced and understood in Finnish society and culture. I investigate the changes in attitudes towards women's baldness and visibility as well as the effect of baldness in women's own experiences and in the public discussion.

## Research Questions

- ❖ How does hairlessness affect women’s daily lives?
- ❖ How has women’s baldness manifested in our society at different times?
- ❖ How does gender define the experience of hairlessness?
- ❖ What stereotypes has our culture and society created for women’s hairlessness?

## Sources

- ❖ Thematic writings “Bald Women”
  - Collected in collaboration with Finnish Literature Association
  - The questionnaire was open 1.3.–31.5.2021
  - I will have the data by 1.9.2021
  - Over 70 writings
- ❖ Digitized articles from Finnish newspapers and magazines
  - From the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the 2010s
  - Retrieved from the National Library of Finland and the Sanoma Archives
- ❖ Interviews
  - Year 2022
- ❖ Archive material

Awful

Manly

Diseased

Homosexual

Activist

Attention-  
seeker

Brave

A timeline how the attitudes and associations towards women baldness has changed from the 1900s to the 2010s.

Punishment

Hidden

Shocking

Symbolic

Public

Trendy

Optional

Hairstyle

Baldness due to disease

• Used to be hidden

Forced baldness

• Punishment: momentarily visible

Optional baldness

• Public & visible