

Invited Commentary

Benefits of Proper Hair Restoration

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No study is necessary to prove the adverse effect that hair loss can have on individuals. Although shaving the head can be an easy and effective solution, this shaved look is not necessarily practical for some people, including those with unattractively shaped heads (in particular, narrow heads), those whose professional status or social standing prohibits it, those who have scarring from prior aesthetic surgery (eg, strip hair transplant), and, of course, nearly all women.

The article in this issue of *JAMA Facial Plastic Surgery* by Bater et al¹ provides an objective quantification of how individuals with and without hair are viewed by society. It is a particularly relevant article for this journal, since hair transplantation is today being performed by more facial plastic surgeons in large part owing to the ready availability of follicular unit extraction technology, which makes it easier for nonhair specialists to offer the procedure.^{2,3} With more than 23 years of experience specializing in hair, I have readily embraced follicular unit extraction not just because of the improved results it provides for patients by avoiding a linear donor site incision scar (preserving the option of shaving the head) but also because it has lowered the barriers to entry for facial plastic surgeons to treat hair loss. Strip (also called follicular unit grafting) still has a role in the surgical armamentarium, in particular in women or in men who have prior donor site scars; however, follicular unit extraction is at this point the preferred technique in most cases.

It should come as no surprise that having hair is associated with professional accomplishment as well as trustworthiness. As the media entertains us with possible explanations for Donald Trump's hair, we should find it relevant as well as revealing that we have not had a bald president of the United States since Harry S. Truman or a bald president of the American Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery since 1995 with Wayne F. Larrabee Jr, MD (to whom we all owe a debt of gratitude for this journal). Considering that approximately 50% of all men older than 50 years have some degree of male pattern hair loss, this lopsidedness of favoring presidents with hair is no coincidence. All of the positive impacts that this article describe as the result of having more hair (ie, youth, attractiveness, success, and approachability), are what likely provide that competitive edge among the electorate.

Leonard Mlodinow, a theoretical physicist and author of several books, including the insightful *Subliminal: How Your Unconscious Mind Rules Your Behavior*,⁴ has described in his writings that, much as with all living creatures, humans rely on perceptions below the conscious level to make snap judgments on peoples' characters. These sensory perceptions include hearing (whereby deeper-voiced men are viewed as not only more dominant but also as better mates) and, in particular, vision, with facial appearance considered particularly important and relevant to this journal. Therefore, whether it is proven objectively by the outcomes of not only presidential but also gubernatorial and congressional campaigns (in 2008, <20% of male governors as well as US senators were bald), or in studies such as the one conducted by Bater and colleagues,¹ the presence of hair is usually preferable to having no hair in terms of how we are judged by others. This preference indicates not only the obvious trait of attractiveness and youthfulness, but also suggests success and approachability and, one could conclude, leadership skills.

Hair transplants can reverse baldness and improve the attractiveness of those with hair loss, as demonstrated by Bater et al.¹ However, it is imperative that this work be done aesthetically, since there are few plastic surgery procedure results more obvious (and more ridiculed) than an unnatural-appearing hair transplant. The surgeon performing a hair transplant is encouraged to respect the responsibility to significantly improve rather than detract from each patient's appearance, learning proper hairline design, recipient site formation, and all of the other critical surgical steps. Understanding when not to do surgery and knowing the role of medical therapy (eg, finasteride, laser light therapy, minoxidil, platelet-rich plasma, and the potential development of stem cells and fat transfer) are also part of this responsibility.

Crowd theory is clearly limited in establishing the level of attractiveness for an individual, for all that really matters is how one person (the patient)—not a crowd—views one's attractiveness in terms of personal satisfaction. I am not surprised to find the degree to which attractiveness was attributed to the presence of hair, but certainly those who can carry a shaved head usually appear to be more masculine and to convey confidence and power. As comedian Larry David, one of the great "sociologists" of our time, who happens to be bald, reflected: "Anyone can be confident with a full head of hair. But a confident bald man—there's your diamond in the rough."⁵

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