

# Do women feel pressured to shave? How Januhairy empowered women worldwide

By Anya Collins

Monday 16th March 2020

Januhairy is a movement that consists of women from around the world letting their body hair naturally grow during January. Traditionally, society has encouraged them to remove this body hair for several reasons: a man's pleasure and for hygiene. The campaign was founded in the UK in 2018 by Laura Jackson - an Exeter University drama student - [who told the BBC](#) at the time that she wanted women to be able to "love and accept" their body hair while raising money for charity. She was 'disgusted' by a woman's bikini line at the swimming baths when she was younger and as an older, more mature woman, she wanted to challenge why she felt such a way.

This movement stems from the social pressure's women face every day for staying natural. As beauty trends have become more inclusive and neutral makeup is promoted, women have felt more inclined to ditch the razor. In 1999, Julia Roberts was pictured on the red carpet with hairy under arms. A considerable number of viewers were offended by this and said that she nearly upstaged the movies opening weekend. Why was this a topic of conversation? Notting hill, a BAFTA winning movie, how could all of this be sabotaged by armpit hair?

Januhairy aims to reduce these stigmas around body hair and as result, it has allowed women from all over the world to stand in solidarity and to feel a part of a community that promotes something so powerful. Each woman will have their own experiences during this month and they may face many challenges from the public, but being with thousands of other women helps them to recognise that they're not alone. I've had my own experiences with shaving and even took part in the Januhairy movement in 2019, like many other women I felt empowered during this time and it came quite naturally to me to just 'ditch the razor'. Overall, the Januhairy community take pride in the fact that they reach out to so many women and are humbled by just how many got involved in 2018.

Shaving has been a concept since 30,000 b.c, hair removal involved shark teeth and sharp shells. Women went to the extremes of using shark teeth just to be desirable for men, which arguably reflects the patriarchal society of that time. A Roman poet, Ovid, urged women to groom so "that no rude goat find his way beneath your arms and that your legs be not rough with bristling hair." Hair, since the roman times has been considered unsanitary and removing it was a signifier of status. Furthermore, throughout the renaissance time women were depicted without pubic hair in portraits and having no hair was deemed classy.

Still to this day, shaving is associated with wealth. As we know female razors are significantly more expensive than male razors. In fact - the coined term- 'pink tax' is what we associate with women's overpriced razors, they usually come in pink packaging which conveniently

costs more. Many celebrities and women worldwide- me included- purchase men's razors instead to solve that problem.

A lot of this research was focused on Caucasian women which left me questioning, what about women from different backgrounds?

Women from an Asian heritage suffer from the social pressures surrounding women's body hair on a larger scale in comparison to Caucasians. A study was conducted in 2014 that compared women of different ethnic backgrounds and their upper lip hair growth. They used the Ferriman-Gallway method to do this, (a severity scale, in this case ranging from 0-4, 0 meaning no hair). They found that 78% of Caucasian women had no facial hair. Indian woman had the most facial hair out of all races with 2% scoring a 3; compared to the other countries that had less than 1%. When analysed by ethnicity, Italian Caucasians had a significant amount of facial hair in comparison to British Caucasian women. This study proves- to a certain extent- that women in Asian cultures are targeted more due to their body hair.

The NHS have also spoken on this topic, they have tried to debunk the myth that hair growth on females is unhygienic. A cross sectional study that took place in the US shows that 59% of women shave their pubic hair to keep their vagina clean. This was brought to the attention of many public health services, they wanted to make it clear that shaving private regions is not compulsory and it does not help to keep you clean. It actually does the opposite; it can cause the skin severe damage and can lead to infections. Overall, pubic hair acts as a barrier as it protects the body against harmful viruses.

Support from well-established organisations and famous faces has essentially removed this stigma around female body hair and made the topic within the media less of a taboo. This has enabled women to be more confident and embrace their body hair- as encouraged by the Januhairy movement.

**Note: I wrote this article for my Alevel coursework so the language or techniques of my writing have since been improved.**