



Styling Masculinity: Gender, Class, and Inequality in the Men's Grooming Industry

Kristen Barber

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The twenty-first century has seen the emergence of a new style of man: the metrosexual. Overwhelmingly straight, white, and wealthy, these impeccably coiffed urban professionals spend big money on everything from facials to pedicures, all part of a multi-billion-dollar male grooming industry. Yet as this innovative study reveals, even as the industry encourages men to invest more in their appearance, it still relies on women to do much of the work.

Styling Masculinity investigates how men's beauty salons have persuaded their clientele to regard them as masculine spaces. To answer this question, sociologist Kristen Barber goes inside Adonis and The Executive, two upscale men's salons in Southern California. Conducting detailed observations and extensive interviews with both customers and employees, she shows how female salon workers not only perform the physical labor of snipping, tweezing, waxing, and exfoliating, but also perform the emotional labor of pampering their clients and pumping up their masculine egos.

Letting salon employees tell their own stories, Barber not only documents occasions when these workers are objectified and demeaned, but also explores how their jobs allow for creativity and confer a degree of professional dignity. In the process, she traces the vast network of economic and social relations that undergird the burgeoning male beauty industry.

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