“Hey, we’re males; we’re different from females”:
Exploring how men incorporate cosmetic and skincare products into masculine identities

A dissertation presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts in Social Anthropology at Massey University, Albany, New Zealand

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2015
Acknowledgements

There are a number of people I need to thank for their help, support and role in the journey and completion of this thesis. Many individuals have contributed to this research; I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge them and show my appreciation.

Thank you to my supervisor Professor Kathryn Rountree. As I finish up my university career it seems poignant that I should come across your book, *Crafting contemporary Pagan identities in a Catholic society* (2010). It reminded me that the Introduction to Social Anthropology lecture, this book, and the essay I wrote exploring this text, were all a first for me as an undergraduate student. The timing of this rediscovery is fitting: it invokes a sense of reflection of my time at Massey University. This time, especially so throughout my postgraduate studies, has been deeply enriched thanks to your involvement. You have provided thought provoking discussions, as well as inspiration and support throughout this journey. Your presence has left a marked impression. The lessons you have provided will continue to influence the person I am.

To the postgrad community within Anthropology. This group has provided a stimulating and supportive learning environment. Within this group I want to give special mention to Dr Graeme MacRae and Dr Barbara Andersen. Graeme was helpful in the early phases of the research. He offered help and direction to allow the initial concept to take form. Barbara has been incredibly involved throughout the writing process. Thank you for making time to read over the multiple draft copies of each chapter. Her plethora of ethnographic reading recommendations and alterations to earlier versions has gifted the research a depth and complexity that would not have been reached without her input.

I would like to thank the individuals who participated in the research. The contributions these individuals made, whether small or big, gave life to the ethnography. The stories and personal insights each individual has provided contextualised contemporary ideas surrounding what it means to be a man in contemporary society.

Lastly, I want to thank my family, friends, and partner, Caleb. Mum, thank you for the late night cups of tea that allowed me to keep writing and the countless conversations. Caleb, thank you for the multiple roles you took on within this ethnography. You have been a pillar of support, a sounding board, and an informal participant. Thank you for the special coffee drop-offs which often gave me the motivation to continue writing. Your love and support have helped me through some very trying moments.
Abstract
Spending on male grooming and beauty products in the West has increased exponentially over the last decade and shows no sign of slowing. Building upon emergent literature that investigates men’s corporeal practices, this study seeks to understand how young men conceptualise, perceive, and construct masculine identities while simultaneously engaging in traditionally feminised beauty practices. Such practices refer to cosmetic use and skincare routines. Utilising a postmodernist perspective, I explored how men are expressing ideas of gender, class, and sexuality within their bodily practices. To achieve this, social media was used as the primary methodological tool. Three online beauty and skincare forums were used—*Makeup Obsessives, Makeup Addiction* and *Skincare Addiction*. The data corpus consists of observations of posts written by the participants within these online communities and a number of private conversations carried-out via computer-mediated messengers. I spoke to retail assistants at cosmetic and skincare counters, observed male-targeted products, and analysed a number of men’s lifestyle magazines. The data revealed that men are ultimately responding to the demands of a postmodern society that has a strong emphasis on consumption. I use the concept the double-bind of masculinity to explore the way men are experiencing the struggle of two conflicting discourses—that of modern consumerism and traditional notions of masculinity. I argue that the construction of “new” masculinities since the 1980s is most strongly connected to advertising which encourages male consumption of appearance related goods and services, rather than to a true reconstruction of masculine ideals. The research suggests that the characteristics of traditional masculinity remain largely unchanged from conventional notions of what it means “to be a man”.

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