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MASSEY UNIVERSITY

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

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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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