

Razors, Shaving and Gender Construction: An Inquiry into the Material Culture of Shaving

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Résumé

L'apparence physique est un aspect important de la perception qu'a une personne de son identité, en particulier dans le contexte de la société de consommation moderne. Cette étude a pour but d'examiner les façons dont les processus et les composantes matérielles d'une forme particulière de soins de beauté, le rasage, reflètent et renforcent à la fois les distinctions traditionnelles de sexe dans la culture nord-américaine moderne. S'inspirant de diverses théories et méthodes, cet article tente de déterminer les catégories symboliques qui entrent dans la conception des rasoirs et d'avancer des façons dont ces significations symboliques sont diffusées. Cet examen préliminaire suggère que les pratiques de rasage modernes sont un rituel exprimant des prescriptions culturelles traditionnelles en fonction du sexe et que les responsables de la fabrication et de la mise en marché de ces produits incorporent presque universellement un éventail d'images associatives dans leurs concepts.

Abstract

Physical appearance is an important aspect of an individual's sense of personal identity, particularly in the context of the modern consumer society. The purpose of this study is to explore the ways in which the processes and material components of one particular grooming practice, namely shaving, both reflect and reinforce traditional gender distinctions in modern North American culture. Drawing on a variety of theories and methodologies, this paper attempts to identify the symbolic categories embedded in razor design, and to suggest some of the ways in which these symbolic meanings are circulated. This preliminary exploration suggests that modern shaving practices are a ritualistic process embodying traditional cultural gender prescriptions, and that manufacturers and marketers of these products almost universally incorporate specific ranges of associative imagery in their designs.

Men have been shaving their faces since prehistoric times at least, as both the archaeological and artistic records attest. Certainly today, shaving is a matter of daily routine for most North American males,¹ who will spend on average 3 000 hours on the activity — about four months — over the course of their lifetimes.² In terms of the actual process involved, it is little thought about: the sequence is routine, the motions habitual, the implements commonplace — or at least so they appear at first glance. However, a closer examination of the material culture and rituals of shaving disclose a complex nexus of gender construction and affirmation that is neither simple nor “natural,” but a culturally defined and refined process entirely devoted to converting the biological “man” into the social “male.”³

In addition, although shaving for women is a relatively new phenomenon⁴ and differs from the male activity in several crucial respects, the same analysis suggests that it too embodies and reflects the same gendering functions, as well as emphasizing and perpetuating many traditional signs of differentiation between the sexes. While this may seem a trivial point in a field dominated by themes of politics, violence and discrimination, I would suggest that it is precisely *because* the micro-ecology of our daily lives is so little considered that we find here the most persistent and deeply rooted reflection of cultural norms and symbols. This paper is intended to open up this field of inquiry by proposing a model and framework for investigating the relationship between consumer grooming products, personal grooming rituals,

ideal body imagery, and finally, the role played by all three in constructing the individual's self-image.⁵

In attempting to uncover the layers of meaning associated with a grooming ritual such as shaving, an immediate difficulty presents itself. In common with most domestic and private activities, references to shaving are conspicuously absent from the documentary record, it being a process so trivial, so unconsidered, so "natural" as to preclude even a diary entry let alone a monograph.⁶ Oral surveys can be equally problematic in the case of men's grooming, as Grant McCracken discovered during the fieldwork for his anthropological study of hair. Men, he noted, "would not participate in the research. Apparently, there's a secret rule of masculinity that says, 'Hair and style are not guy stuff'."⁷ The problem is further exacerbated by the difficulty in locating an adequate number of respondents for the earlier periods of a study that spans more than a century. In any event, neither textual research nor oral history seems likely to produce an adequate range of meaningful information in the present context. A third approach, and the one that has been adopted here, is through the objects themselves, using the theories and methods associated with the field of Material History.⁸

Most people today accept the notion that objects can reveal a great deal of information about the people who make, use and display them. In fact, we all regularly make judgements about people based on what they wear, the kind of car they drive, where they live and so on. In doing so, we are implicitly acknowledging that the material goods we surround ourselves with can be taken as a reflection of the kind of person we are. Explaining precisely *how* such information manifests and conveys itself, however, is considerably more problematic.

The difficulty lies in an understanding of how "meaning" can be conveyed by an object, since meaning is always and only in the mind of the beholder. Artifactual analysis, in short, requires a significant semiotic component, although one that is not based on linguistics but on predominately tactile and visual input. This is an area that is crucial to an understanding of the role of objects in a consumer society, but one which has not to date been adequately accommodated in the dominant analytic paradigms.

Before turning to the direct examination of the materials and rituals of shaving, it should be stressed that there is nothing inherently "natural" about the process. In fact, quite the

opposite is true: what is *natural* for the human male is the *presence* of facial and other epigamic hair, which from earliest times has served as an important primary signifier of the sex. As one writer put it, "because facial hair is one of the obvious characteristics that differentiate the male from the female, it is not surprising that hairiness has become a symbol and a proof of masculinity. The ability to grow a beard is a specifically male ability..." The author goes on to elucidate the association between puberty, fertility and virility, and concludes that "there follows [a] simple equation: male hair equals virility, equals power, equals strength."⁹

If this is true, and there is strong evidence to suggest that it is, then the modern paradigm of the perpetually clean-cheeked male is all the more astonishing. And it is very much a twentieth-century phenomenon, whose genesis can be pinpointed with some accuracy to the release of the Gillette safety razor in 1903.¹⁰ Prior to this time, shaving was an exclusively male activity, and was invariably performed with a straight or "cut-throat" razor. It was a time-consuming, dangerous and moderately expensive process, and as a result only the relatively wealthy or leisured could actually manage to shave on a daily basis, often at the hands of a servant expressly retained for that purpose.

The more common practice was to shave only once or twice a week, and for the urban middle class at least this was often managed through regular visits to the barber. Prior to the twentieth century, therefore, "clean-shavenness" was a highly relative term, since most men must have sported a one or two-day growth of beard most of the time. It was also in these earlier stages at least partially class-distinguishing and in many cases a social rather than private activity.¹¹

As a common, or if you will, "democratic," practice then, the ritual of the daily shave is a uniquely twentieth-century phenomenon whose origins coincide almost precisely with several related developments around the turn of the century.¹² Of these, the most germane for the present study was the change in perception of the "self" from being a fixed identity to a variable "constructed" one. As historian Kathy Peiss summarized it:

Where mid-nineteenth-century Americans had believed in the fixity of identity, a fundamental self rooted in a moral economy of hard work and thrift, by the 1920s, self had become largely a matter of merchandising and performance

and was built around commodities, style, and personal magnetism.¹³

Peiss goes on to note that “while performances may inherently constitute identity, they became more visible and apparent as *performances* in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.”¹⁴ This is an important issue, and one that I will be returning to, but for the present it is enough to note how the idea of the constructed identity is reflected in the advice books of the 1960s and 1970s on how to “dress right.” That these books exist at all may be viewed as “an indicator of a hidden cultural bias,”¹⁵ reflecting the modern perception of personal identity as a self-created and variable social construct. Since these works are prescriptive rather than analytic — they explain how to conform to the dress code without explaining how or why such a code came to be — they also have the ideological effect of suggesting that such codes are somehow “natural” and external, a normative ideal towards which all right-thinking people will strive as a matter of course. And, although primarily concerned with clothing, these books are all quite definite on the subject of facial hair: “Most men should not wear facial hair of any kind, particularly beards. The response to facial hair is almost always negative,”¹⁶ and “Men who are clean-shaven have a better chance of getting a job, and being widely and readily accepted in business.”¹⁷

Thus, by mid-century at least, the ideal of clean-shavenness has shifted from being a matter of fashion or personal preference to being a normative cultural value for men.¹⁸ More importantly, a man’s face is now perceived as a manipulable element in the presentation of the self, a display good in its own right, and it is within the context of this crucial conceptual change that the evolution of the modern razor must be considered.

Of the many ways of classifying items within a given constellation of objects — by materials used, date of manufacture, technological sophistication, decorative elements, or any other common characteristic — the most robust approach for our purposes is the use of formal sequences comprising a “Prime Object” and subsequent replications, in part because tools or implements such as razors “commonly have extremely long durations.”¹⁹ By first identifying such sequences, we can both analyse the characteristics within each range as well as discern any significant differences or similarities between them.

As a starting point, we may accept the basic distinction between the utility of the object and its design. As Roland Barthes notes, objects “always have, in principle, a function...we believe we experience [them] as pure instruments, whereas in reality they carry other things, they are also something else: they function as the vehicle of meaning: in other words, the object effectively serves some purpose, but it also serves to communicate information.”²⁰ Since function in this sense precedes form, the first approach to the objects will be from the standpoint of their utility, with a primary focus on their essential engineering component, the cutting edge or blade.

From this functional perspective, an examination of the typology and morphology of the various razors produced in the last one hundred years²¹ reveals two primary formal sequences: the manual or “wet” razor, and the electric or “dry” shaver.²² Within in the first of these sequences, there also exists a sub-division of sufficient importance between the straight (cut-throat) razor and the safety razor that we can reasonably make this additional distinction at the outset. The resulting high-level classification is therefore three-fold: the straight razor, the safety razor and the electric razor.

The earliest and by far the most durable razor style is the straight razor (Fig. 1). Although it is impossible to tell when the first of these objects appeared, they have certainly been in constant use since at least the first half of the seventeenth century. Throughout this 350-year

Fig. 1
Straight Razor, ca 1900
(NMST)



Fig. 2
Rolls Razor, ca 1950
(Author's collection)

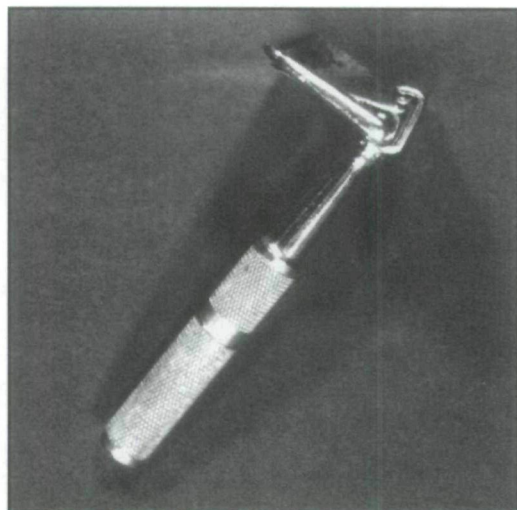
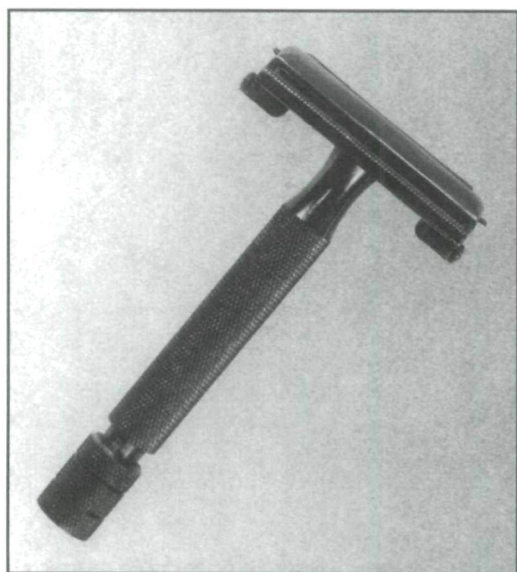


Fig. 3
Rolls Razor case, ca 1950
(NMST)



Fig. 4
Gillette Safety Razor,
ca 1903 (NMST)



span, the essential shape and manufacture have remained unchanged, except for the development of the much sharper “hollow-ground” (concave) blade in the early 1800s. The tempered-steel blades require regular maintenance (honing and stropping), and will eventually wear down.²³ Although the general shape and construction of these razors remains remarkably consistent, significant differentiation can be discerned in the materials and design of the handles, which range from carved ivory or tortoiseshell to plain black rubber. Since the functional component — the blade — was essentially standardized, much of the cost of razors was based on these considerations, and the existence of “high-end” models suggests that they were used as status symbols. This accords well with Thorstein Veblen’s classic work on conspicuous consumption, which was first published in 1899, the heyday of the straight razor.²⁴

Perhaps the most obvious and striking attribute of the straight razor is that it was “a sometimes lethal...liability in the home...[D]ue to its intrinsic qualities it constituted a distinct peril to amateur users, those with shaky hands, and of course, children.”²⁵ The household danger posed by the straight razor was first addressed in the 1890s, when a wire guard was placed around a much abbreviated, but technically identical blade. These early “safety” razors still required regular care, but the guard mechanism precluded the use of traditional honing and stropping procedures. The blades had to be made removable — thus giving rise to the characteristic “hoe-shape” of this razor style (Fig. 2) — and provided with their own specially-designed sharpening devices.

They were generally very complicated arrangements, and elaborately presented.²⁶ The Rolls Razor came in a silk-lined presentation box, and incorporated a nickle-plated brass case, inside of which were a whetstone and strop, and an elaborate gear-and-track mechanism for sharpening the blade (Fig. 3). Like the straight razor before it, these implements were intended for use by men, and still exhibit signs of class-based differentiation in the range of expensive, high-end models.

The real breakthrough in safety razors occurred in 1903, when King Camp Gillette introduced the enormously popular T-shape razor featuring a double-edged disposable blade (Fig. 4). It was the disposability factor that truly revolutionized shaving practices. Although the razor itself was relatively expensive (\$5 compared

to \$1 for a standard straight razor), the blades were not. By thus combining safety with convenience and low cost, the Gillette razor facilitated the shift to the ideal of universal daily clean-shavenness.

His efforts were supported by patent protection and a healthy advertising budget, but the real key to Gillette's success was probably the American entry into the First World War. The U.S. government, having decided that American soldiers were to be perpetually clean-shaven, awarded Gillette with a contract to supply every serviceman with a shaving kit.²⁷ By the end of the war, when Gillette's patent ran out, a whole generation of men from all classes was accustomed to the idea of the daily shave, and the Gillette razor as the means for achieving it. Significantly, from this time forward, manufacturers stopped producing high-end versions of their razors, and the ideal of the shaved face shifted from being a matter of fashion to being a generally accepted sign of North American manhood. Also by this time, most American homes were becoming equipped with bathrooms,²⁸ so that by mid-century shaving had been transformed from a public ritual to a private one, and the barber-shop was well into its decline.

Finally, it was during these war years that "ladies'" shavers first appeared, ushering in a new era of design differentiation based on gender, an issue we will be returning to. In light of Gillette's obvious success, later safety razor designs — such as the "injector" style introduced in the 1920s — have all focused on the triple combination of safety, convenience and cost, although all have retained the older hoe-shape styling for a variety of technical, financial and aesthetic reasons.

The last of the three major razor types to emerge is the electric shaver, introduced in 1931 by Jacob Schick. These razors provided enhanced safety and convenience, but were comparatively expensive items. These shavers require dependable electric current and, whether or not one subscribes to Adrian Forty's assertion that the production of electric appliances was in part a deliberate attempt to promote demand for domestic electrical power,²⁹ it is obvious that wide-spread acceptance of these razors depended on the existence of home electricity. It should be noted from a functional perspective that since the cutting edge never touches the skin, it is still widely believed that "[n]o matter what the guy in the commercial says, no electric razor will shave as



close as a blade."³⁰ To this day, the electric shaver holds only a small portion of the market numerically, although not necessarily in dollar value³¹ (Fig. 5).

A complete functional typology of these primary sequences³² in razor design is shown in Table 1. The dates given refer to the first appearance of each razor type on the market. Where the precise date is not known, the earliest confirmed reference is noted in brackets. In reviewing this table, it should be kept in mind that although the items are presented chronologically, each new style represents an *addition* to the range of options, not a replacement for its predecessors. In fact, all but the early re-usable blade safety razors still remain in regular use and production, and even the complicated Rolls Razor endured at least into the 1950s.³³

The analysis presented in Table 1 clearly indicates an overall historical movement towards increased user safety and convenience. Interestingly, in almost every case these developments were made at the expense of functional effectiveness, with the earlier models generally providing closer shaves. Clearly, there is more at work here than a desire for a better shave, and although the research results already suggest a number of potentially rewarding research directions — such as the relationship between these changes and the spread of household plumbing and electric power — the examination of *all* the

Fig. 5
Rotary Electric, ca 1990
(NMST)

Table 1
Functional Classification of Razors

Class	Type	Key feature	Analysis
Straight (1750?)	straight	fixed blade	Extremely dangerous. Requires regular honing and stropping. Requires knowledge of steel manufacture.
Safety (1898)	hoe-shape	protective bar	Much safer, although blades require regular honing and stropping as before. Change in design requires change in shaving motion, and requires complex packaging of shaving "system."
Safety 1903	T-shape	disposable blade	Safer than straight razor, but blades need to be handled directly to replace. Much more convenient — no honing or stropping. Disposable blades require controlled automation — mass production.
Safety 1921	hoe-shape	injector blades — disposable blades	Safer than the T shape since blades are not handled directly. Same convenience. Complex mechanism.
Electric 1931	oscillating	sweeping cut	Safer than manual — blade never touches the skin directly. Long-term convenience, infrequent replacement or maintenance, but high cost. Requires general availability of household electricity. Shave is less close than any manual.
Electric 1938	rotary	circular cut	Same as the oscillating model. Primarily a matter of consumer choice.
Safety 1970	hoe-shape	disposable cartridge	Safe — blade does not have to be handled directly. Convenient — no honing or stropping. Requires sophisticated methods of plastics and injection moulding.
Safety 1975	hoe-shape	disposable razor	Safest and most convenient of all manuals. No maintenance or replacement of parts, but quality is variable. Inexpensive and often cheaply made.

artifacts of this object class reveals a second series of characteristics that immediately commands attention.

These secondary distinctions, significantly, have nothing whatsoever to do with the functionality of the razors, but rather with their design. These formal elements appear as two distinct groups of binary polarities each of which, considered as a unique series, reveals a singular persistence of design characteristics across the entire object range. In the first group (which includes all the illustrations provided to date), the shape is considerably elongated, with the edges squared or extremely abruptly turned. Colours are restricted to black or earth-neutral tones, and decorative elements are

sparingly used, usually taking the form of manufacturers' names or logos. Where pure decoration is applied — particularly in the handles of the more expensive straight razors — the images most frequently used are those associated with activities such as hunting or sailing. In some instances, notably in the earliest safety razors and in many electric models, the "technological" aspect of razors is stressed through the exaggerated use of elements such as metal teeth or a "control panel." It can be argued that some of these elements are not discretionary design elements at all, but are intrinsic to efficient razor design. After all, a handle is required for gripping, so the elongated form is only "natural." However, such a

Table 2
Razor Design Characteristics

Element	Group A	Group B
Overall shape	long, thin, rectilinear	short, full, curvilinear
Edges	angular, sharp	rounded, smooth
Colour	black, dark, neutral	white, light, tinted
Decoration	none, sparse, discrete	moderate, prominent, strong
Impression	structural, efficient, functional	organic, fluid, decorative

claim is immediately dispelled by comparing these razors with their counterparts in the second group.

In almost every case, these objects have been created to reflect a list of values antithetical to the attributes identified above. The over-all shape is compressed and reduced, the edges rounded, a lighter colour used, all angular elements are made curvilinear, and major decorative elements have been added, most often employing floral motifs or circular geometrics. In general terms, these formal classes may be presented schematically in Table 2.

It is tempting at this juncture to attempt to place an interpretation on these categories in terms of their human, social significance, and indeed this is a necessary next step if we are to elicit meaning from the artifacts. It is important to recognize, however, that in doing so we move away from any claim to methodological objectivity. Meaning, as noted earlier, is not resident in objects, but in the mind of the observer. The most that strict artifactual analysis can convey is the base fact that these differential categories exist, and to delineate the visual and material components that comprise the various categories. Fortunately, in the case of razors, or of any twentieth-century consumer good, we do not need to make the leap into the subjective void unaided. Ever since these differentiated products first appeared in the 1910s, we have been told explicitly — through packaging and advertising — what the categories signify: the razors in Group A are intended for use by men; the items in Group B, for women. Table 2 can now be represented as shown in Table 3.

Note that the Figures 6 and 7 are the “male” and “female” versions of the same razor — the Gillette Sensor Excel — and that there are no obvious differences in the blade construction between the two. Notice also the design of the grip — perfectly straight on the male version,

curved or ribbed on the female. Of course, not every razor displays the entire range of differentiating elements, nor necessarily to the same degree, but every case examined to date exhibits enough compliance with one or the other of these value sets to enable us to generalize with considerable confidence that twentieth-century razors universally incorporate gender-distinguishing design elements.

By extension, razors become themselves signifiers of gender, and can be used as such in other contexts. If a man finds a woman’s razor in his son’s dorm room, he will very likely assume that his progeny has had an overnight female guest. The same is true, although less so, if the genders are reversed.³⁴ Nor has this differentiation on the basis of sex gone unnoticed. In describing a pair of electric razors, British architectural design historian Adrian Forty notes that “the lady’s razor is coloured, and decorated with a floral device, so appearing more “feminine” than the plain black model for men,”³⁵ while a recent assessment of an unusual 1950s design prompted the observation

Table 3
Gender-distinguishing Razor Design Elements

Men	Women
elongated	rounded
rectilinear	curvilinear
dark, neutral	light, coloured
sober	frivolous
structural	organic
efficient	decorative

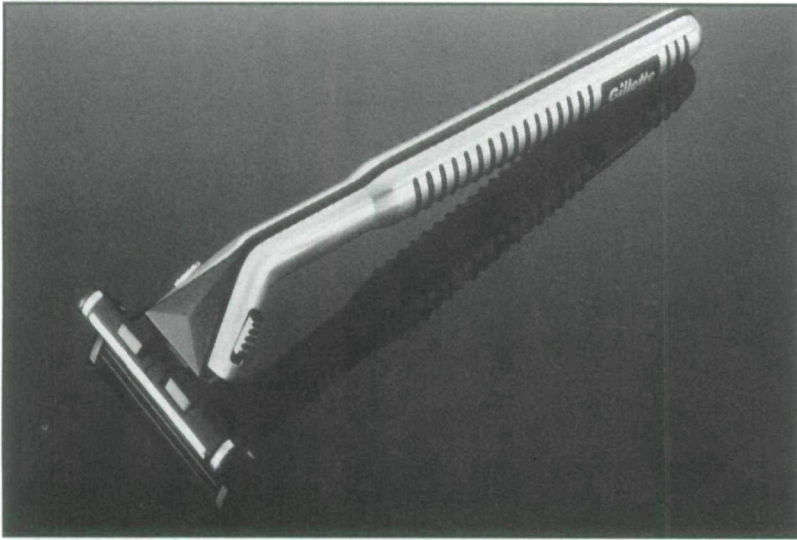
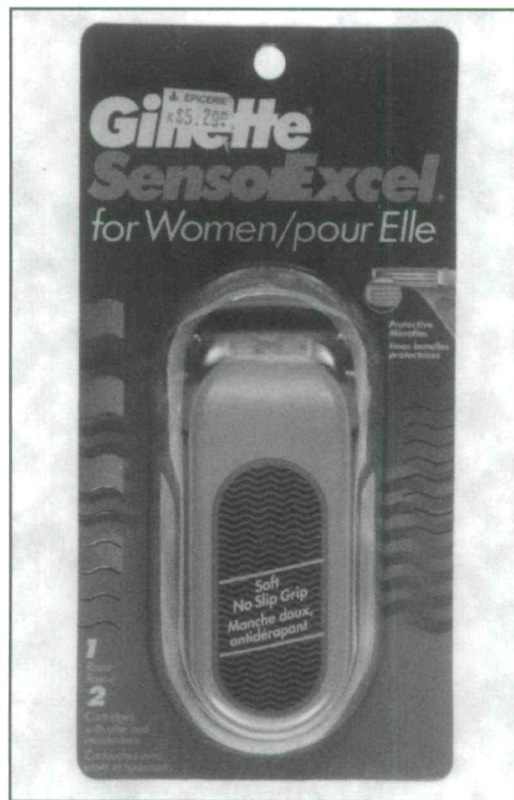


Fig. 6
Gillette Sensor Excel
for Men (NMST)

Fig. 7
Gillette Sensor Excel
for Women (NMST)



that “[t]he cream coloring is highly unusual; men’s razors are produced almost exclusively in black, grey, or silver.”³⁶

Any remaining doubt as to the intentionality³⁷ of this design differentiation can be readily dispelled by examining the packaging associated with each razor. In every case, the design elements listed above have been repeated in the packaging. For the man’s model shown above,

the package is black with silver and blue horizontal stripes: for women it is sea-green with texturizing and a wave motif. In the more substantial storage boxes required for electric shavers, the difference is if anything even more marked. In the examples that prompted Forty’s assessment cited above, the men’s rectangular black case suggests solidity, efficiency and restraint. By comparison, the woman’s round, white version echoes the design characteristics of the razor itself, and resembles a face-powder box rather than the man’s “tool box” look. In short, the packaging employed for razors conforms in every case to the same differentiated value-categories for men and women as have already been identified in the razors themselves.

In summary, it is clear from the available artifactual evidence that the cultural values which inform the design and packaging of twentieth-century razors embody a strong sense of differentiation between “male” and “female” attributes. We can also at this point identify, at least in part, the specific symbolic elements, expressed as a series of binary oppositions, that are associated with each category — dark/light, functional/decorative, structural/organic, angular/rounded and so on. Moreover, because these are *cultural* categories, we can expect to find echoes of the same symbolic elements in other goods produced by that culture — and so we do, in everything from shoes to watches to wedding apparel to VCR controls. In short, beginning with simple objects such as razors, we can begin to compile a lexicon of cultural symbols that can be used as a tool for further analysis of the primary design characteristics of modern North American consumer goods.

It may be fairly asserted at this stage that the analysis presented here is a proof and a vindication of the assertion that “the commonplace artifacts of everyday life mirror a society’s values as accurately as its great monuments.”³⁸ I would argue however that this analysis, revealing as it is, fails to provide a complete picture in the context of twentieth-century consumerism. The problem is that it is one-sided, a “supply-side” paradigm that illustrates how cultural meaning is transferred *to* objects through the design and manufacturing process. What it fails to address is the effect these meaning-laden objects have on the individual consumer, how such meanings may be appropriated by the individuals who collectively make up a culture, or how the public display of these objects may influence social interaction between members of the same or differing cultures. In short, as

Victoria de Grazia puts it, "an understanding of social relations requires that the realm of consumption be considered on a par with forces of production."³⁹

These are large issues, and quite beyond the scope of this paper to address fully or even adequately. I would like, however, to suggest that if meaning resides not in the object but "arises from the interaction of individual, object and context,"⁴⁰ then one way to approach the question is, if you will, to follow the objects through the various circumstances in which we interact with them. For grooming goods such as razors, two of the more important of these situations are advertising and the grooming ritual itself.

The range of styles and techniques used in shaving advertising over the course of the century coincides fairly neatly with the overall evolution of twentieth-century advertising.⁴¹ Typically, the earliest razor advertisements were little more than bald statements of availability, but by the end of the nineteenth century they were increasingly used to extol the specific virtues and technical excellence of a given product. In this pre-radio, pre-television era, text dominated the ads, although often accompanied by simple illustrations. These texts tended to reinforce the categorical differentiations we have already noted. For example, in a 1936 catalogue advertisement, a new ladies' razor is described as: "Women's Tiny Safety Razor with two-section handle and two blades in a miniature Vanity Case. Gold color."⁴² Note that the new model is "tiny" although the blades used are the same, and the box is "miniature" — a "Vanity Case" rather than a Dressing Case or Razor Case. By comparison, when Gillette produced its Bulldog model in 1914, featuring a "thick, heavily knurled handle," it was made clear to the sales force that it was intended for the "solid-framed, athletic chap...It goes with his stout walking stick, his Bulldog pipe, his man's size pocket knife and his thick fountain pen."⁴³ Note how in both cases verbal description is used to reinforce the physical design elements and underline the gender distinctions being drawn.

This kind of gender-differentiating descriptive rhetoric has persisted in shaving advertising to the present day, but since at least mid century the textual component has been largely superseded by visual imagery. Many early studies of figurative advertising tended to view it as either a simple adjunct to the product itself, as a dangerous and coercive manipulation

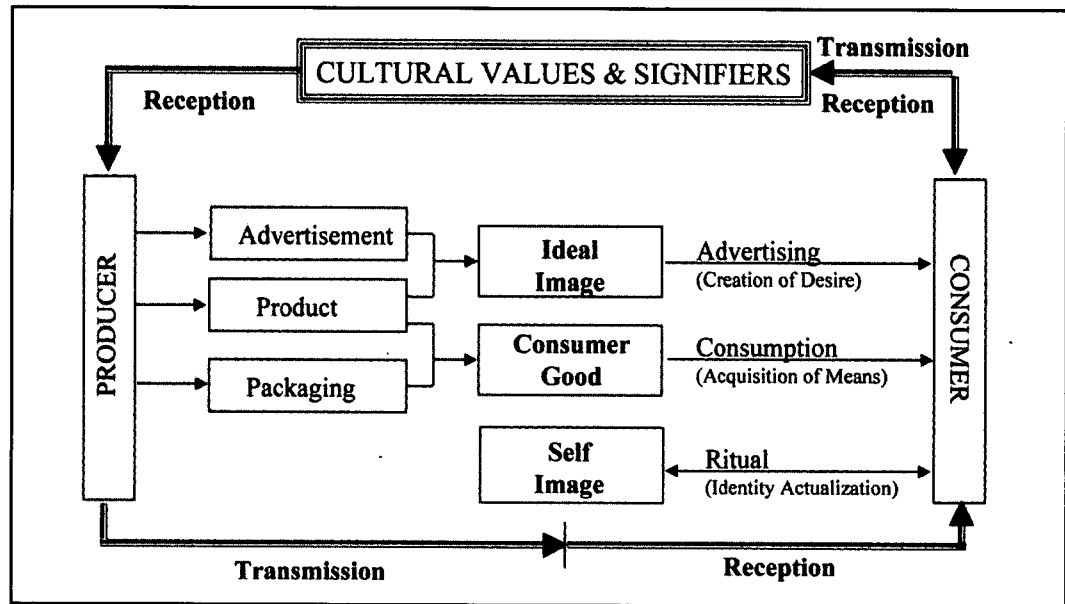
of our subconscious minds, or as a vehicle for conveying the product's "message" to the consumer.⁴⁴ These views by implication assign an active role to the advertisement in the transmission of meaning, and place the consumer in an entirely passive position.

However, as more recent studies are beginning to show,⁴⁵ this is an untenable position. While advertising is most certainly manipulative, to the extent that it employs signs we will react to subconsciously rather than consciously, it is not *coercive* — it cannot force us to find any meanings in it that we do not put there ourselves. Thus, "the work of the advertisement is not to invent a meaning for [its product], but to translate meaning for it by means of a sign system we already know."⁴⁶ The advertisement, in short, is simply *another* object, designed and encoded with cultural signs and symbols that it is hoped will be correctly interpreted by the audience, but "[t]he (potential) consumer... decides what these signs mean and what the meaning of the advertisement is as a whole."⁴⁷

It is not within the scope of this essay to attempt a semiotic analysis of the specific meanings encoded in these ads, but there are several important generalizations that can be made that bear directly on the issue at hand. The first of these is the simple fact that the product itself appears in virtually every advertisement.⁴⁸ This rather obvious point is important because it means that the gender-coded design elements discussed earlier *also* appear in every ad. The second most common image used in men's razor advertising over the years is that of the male face. The facial images portrayed, moreover, fall within a fairly narrow range. The men are all relatively young, well groomed and fit; their expressions are serious, their gazes direct. Most are white.⁴⁹ And finally, of course, all are clean shaved. This is hardly surprising, since men's razors are — to return to a point made earlier — implements designed for the sole purpose of removing facial hair.⁵⁰ From a marketing perspective, therefore, what a razor *does* is more important than what it *is*, and what it does is provide the means for creating a desirable facial image.

However, while that image may be *reflected* in these ads, it is not created there, or at least not entirely. Similar representations of "the masculine face" pervade the visual mass media, which in modern society is undoubtedly the main source of information about standards of personal appearance. This is a critical point in the current context — of the hundreds of positive

Fig. 8
Circulation of meanings
in a consumer culture



public images of men considered for this study, only a handful are wearing a beard, and less than twenty per cent a moustache.⁵¹ This is true not only of advertising images, but also of representations of reporters, politicians, movie stars, and other public figures. In other words, although other attributes such as clothing, hair and general surroundings may differentiate between alternative presentations of physical manhood, a clean shaved face has been a universal norm for most of the last century.

Along with this "ideal" male face, many other masculine values have been employed to considerable effect in razor advertising over the years, notably the use of sports metaphors and endorsements.⁵² But regardless of the specific referents used, all the images presented in shaving ads are objects carrying a different — but parallel and associated — range of "masculine" values as those uncovered in the objects themselves. Thus, although most razor ads continue to display the product itself, in most cases it has become just one signifier among many. By associating the product with these other signifiers, the advertisement creates a semiotic linkage between them: the razor takes on the attributes of these representations of masculinity. But — and this is the crux of the argument — the razor itself also becomes a part of that idealized masculinity. While it may be true, as Judith Williamson has suggested, that it is the advertising image itself that we buy, and the product is just the "currency" for obtaining it, we must not ignore the fact that the product is now part of that image. Once we recognize

the advertisement as a composite meta-sign incorporating both the product and a variable set of value-laden signifiers, the theoretical perspective required to identify the full cycle of meaning transfer can be illustrated as shown in the diagram in Figure 8.

The activities presented on the left side of the diagram are those involved in encoding meaning into objects — products, packages and advertisement. These objects are in turn presented to the public as composite goods: the ideal image as presented through the media, and the actual consumer good as it appears on the shelf. The final link in the cycle of meaning-transmission in a consumer society is a series of processes performed by the consumer: the subscription to the idealized image, which creates desire; the acquisition of the product, which provides the means of achieving that desire; and finally, the performance of a ritual — in this case grooming — intended to appropriate the values of the ideal image to the self-image. Note that in all cases the consumer's acceptance of the meanings being conveyed are dependent on his conformance to the cultural imagery being used, as indicated by the "Reception" arrow in the upper right.

As this model suggests, the final and crucial process of meaning transfer resides in the active appropriation of the values already accepted from the advertising and marketing processes through some form of ritual by which consumers attempt to make "the world they create...consistent with the world they imagine."⁵³ The nature of this ritual depends on the type and

utility of the good being consumed. With display goods such as clothing, cars, furniture or even pets, the act of consumption is public and social, and receives its validation from the reaction of others. For private grooming goods such as razors, however, the process is somewhat more complex, because there is no obvious "other" — no audience — involved in the process.⁵⁴ Unlike display goods, shaving implements are not employed in the *presentation* of self (to use Goffman's phrase), but in the *preparation* of self, and as Dennis Rook notes, "[f]ew rituals are as closely linked to the psychosocial identity crisis as daily grooming rituals."⁵⁵

To put it another way, display goods are used to make us appear desirable in the eyes of others: grooming goods are intended to help us define ourselves to ourselves through appropriation, and as implements are used in a second process to create a display good, that is, our visible bodies. This is an area that has received very little scholarly attention in the context of modern consumer practices, but one which urgently demands further investigation.⁵⁶

Of the four essential components involved in ritualistic behaviour — artifacts, script, role(s) and audience — shaving for men can be shown to fulfil the first three requirements, bearing in mind that a "script" does not necessarily involve verbal components,⁵⁷ and noting the conditional plural where roles are concerned. The fourth requirement, however, seems to present an insurmountable condition, since shaving today is almost always performed in private.⁵⁸ I would suggest, however, that this apparent solitude is in some senses an illusion. There are two presences involved in the shaving process: the man with the razor and the man in the mirror. The first is the subject of the exercise, the second the object — "I" and "me," ego and superego, being and becoming, self and image.

Seen in this light, shaving is a ritual act of self-definition by which a man creates a critical element of his public masculinity — his face. This focus on the face is crucially important, since in Western culture at least, "the face, of all parts of the human body, has been marked as particularly meaningful, a unique site of expression, beauty, and character."⁵⁹ Equally important in the present context is the mirror image itself, since it is *that* image which is being created *as an object with identical characteristics to the advertisements used to sell the product*. Both ad and mirror display a man using a razor to shave his face. The objective of the ritual is to align the two images and thereby

achieve the *other* values the ad tells us are available through this process — happiness, confidence, strength, sexual attractiveness, success, etc. In Judith Williamson's formulation:

*Thus our faces, having already been removed from us (you cannot see your own face) by the mirror, can be taken over completely, as the only time our face ever appears to us completely is at a distance, as an image, and in...ads our face becomes, not part of us, the consumer, but the product.*⁶⁰

The shaving ritual, then, is much more than a simple mechanical act involving the removal of facial hair. It is also, and perhaps more so, a ritualized performance by which a human male *creates* one specific modern masculine gender value — clean-shavenness — through the *appropriation* of other masculine values from the objects used, as a means of *integrating* his imaged self with the ideal self as expressed through advertising. And when enough men perform this act of appropriation or integration often enough and long enough, every element of the ritual becomes increasingly embedded as a cultural norm, and in turn becomes a signifier of the thing once signified.

Thus, the clean-shaven look, once a fashion option, may be seen to have evolved over the course of the twentieth century into a primary signifier of North American masculinity. And while the extreme symbolic gender categories encoded in the design of razors and packaging may appear grossly outdated in these closing years of the century, their close association with the ritual they support has served to formalize and perpetuate those categories in our common psyche. As a result, every time a man shaves he confirms and renews the polar gender distinctions embodied in the razors' design. In the current climate of egalitarian non-discriminatory individualism, this may reasonably be viewed as a subversive counter-current to the struggle for equalization of the gender norms.

As a final note, although I have found no directly relevant literature in this area, I would suggest that grooming rituals may lie at the heart of some inter-generational transfer of gender norms: as culture inculcates the value of being clean shaved, each teenager must learn to shave, often with parental instruction and using the same rituals and implements as the generations before him. Thus the cycle of symbolic gender differences is perpetuated, reinforced rather than reduced by the material culture in which it is embodied.

NOTES

1. For entirely pragmatic reasons, I have restricted this study to North Americans of European descent, although there is ample evidence that regular shaving has been widely adopted by many races and cultures worldwide.
2. Denis Boyles with Gregg Stebben, *A Man's Life: The Complete Instructions* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 133. According to the same source, men also spend \$80 million a year on razors and almost \$1 billion on replacement blades. However trivial a process shaving may be for the individual, it is clearly a large and thriving industry!
3. I have accepted as a starting point for this discussion the distinction between a biologically constructed "sexual" identity and a socially constructed "gender" identity. For a recent debate on the validity of this distinction, see John Hood-Williams, "Goodbye to Sex and Gender," *The Sociological Review* 44, no. 1 (February 1996): 1-16 and Robert Willmott, "Resisting Sex/Gender Conflation: A Rejoinder to John Hood-Williams," *The Sociological Review* 44, no. 4 (November 1996): 728-745. For a more radical feminist critique of biological essentialism, and of gender differentiation in general, see Sandra Lipsitz Bem, *The Lenses of Gender: Transforming the Debate on Sexual Equality* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); Ellyn Kaschak, *Engendered Lives: A New Psychology of Women's Experience* (New York: BasicBooks, A Division of HarperCollins, 1992); Claire M. Renzetti and Daniel J. Curran, *Women, Men, and Society*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1992).
4. As far as the documentary record shows, women only began shaving with any regularity in the 1910s and 1920s, when hemlines rose and sleeves came off. Certainly it was in this era that the first "ladies" razors appeared on the market: in 1915 Gillette released the "Milady Decollette," "...the first razor designed and marketed specifically for women." (Russell B. Adams Jr, *King C. Gillette: The Man and His Wonderful Shaving Device* (Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1978), 92.) In the absence of any contradictory evidence, we may accept this as a tentative answer, but the visual and literary persistence in Western art of the ideal of the completely smooth female body surely suggests that some women at least would have taken steps to comply with that ideal, particularly those whose "job" it was to appeal to men, such as courtesans or hetaera. What means they might have used, however, may never be identified with any certainty.
5. This paper forms the first part of an ongoing study into the relationship between personal grooming practices and the construction of individual identity. As such, it touches upon a number of related issues without necessarily providing any detailed coverage of these ancillary topics. In particular, I have provided only a cursory overview of the critical issues of advertising and private grooming rituals, while barely touching on the barbershop experience. Many other intriguing avenues have also been left untouched, such as the phenomenon of head shaving, or the range of religious, racial and ethnic variations in shaving.
6. Specific textual references to shaving are extremely sparse, and are usually found in broader surveys of hair fashions. The best accounts are found in Wendy Cooper, *Hair: Sex, Society, Symbolism* (New York: Stein and Day, 1971); Leslie Dunkling and John Foley, *The Guinness Book of Beards and Moustaches* (Middlesex: Guinness, 1990); and Roy Ritchie and Ron Stewart, *The Standard Guide to Razors* (Paducah, Kentucky: Collector Books, 1995). Of the general surveys, a useful comparison can be made between the British perspective of Richard Corson, *Fashions in Hair: The First Five Thousand Years* (London: Peter Owen, 1965), and a French counterpart by Catherine Lebas and Annie Jacques, *La coiffure en France du moyen âge à nos jours* (France: Delmas International S.A., 1979). Other interesting historical perspectives may be found in William Andrews, *At the Sign of the Barber Pole: Studies in Hirsute History* (1904; reprint, Detroit: Singing Tree Press, 1969); Arthur Bass Moler, *The Barber's Manual* (1911), rev. ed. 1927; Reginald Reynolds, *Beards: Their Social Standing, Religious Involvements, Decorative Possibilities and Value in Offense and Defense through the Ages* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1949); and Ruth P. Rubinstein, *Dress Codes: Meanings and Messages in American Culture* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995).
7. Grant McCracken, *Big Hair: A Journey into the Transformation of Self* (Penguin Books, 1996), 6. This observation is obviously not true for all men at all times, and numerous men were quite willing to discuss the matter with the author. Others, particularly older males, did however display the reticence noted by McCracken.
8. The key statements of method used here are: Jules David Prown, "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method," *Winterthur Portfolio* 17, no. 1 (Spring 1982): 1-19; E. McClung Fleming, "Artifact Study: A Proposed Model," *Winterthur Portfolio* 9 (1974), 153-173, and Robert S. Elliot, "Towards a Material History Methodology," *Material History Bulletin* 22 (Fall 1985): 31-40. For the preliminary classification process, I have drawn substantially on Craig Gilborn, "Pop Pedagogy: Looking at the Coke Bottle," in *Material Culture Studies in America*, ed. Thomas J. Schlereth (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1982), 183-191, and the theoretical approach enunciated in George Kubler, *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967). Some important critiques of these methods and theories can be found in Thomas J. Schlereth, "Material Culture or Material Life: Discipline or Field? Theory or Method?" in *Living in a Material World: Canadian and American Approaches to Material Culture*, ed. Gerald L. Pocius (St John's, Newfoundland: Institute of Social And Economic Research, 1991), 231-240; John Dixon Hunt, "The Sign of the Object," in *History from Things: Essays on Material Culture*, ed. Steven Lubar and W. David Kingery (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993), 293-298; Cary Carson, "Doing History with Material Culture," in *Material Culture and the Study of*

- American Life*, ed. Ian M. G. Quimby (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978), 41–64; William Hesselstine, "The Challenge of the Artifact" (1959), reprinted in Schlereth, *Material Culture Studies*, 93–100; John Chavis, "The Artifact and the Study of History," *Curator* 7 (1964): 156–162.
9. Cooper, *Hair*, 38.
 10. For a statistical look at representation of beardedness see Dwight E. Robinson, "Fashions in Shaving and Trimming of the Beard: The Men of the *Illustrated London News*, 1842–1972," *American Journal of Sociology* 81, no. 5 (March 1976): 1133–1141.
 11. The important distinction here is between shaving as a fashion and shaving as a generalized grooming activity. For most of history, beards were a class-based signal of differentiation, and subject to all the vagaries of fashion. Interestingly, recent specialty catalogues include a selection of straight razors and shaving brushes costing several hundred dollars apiece — considerably higher than their usual relative value from an historical perspective. This would suggest that the use or ownership of such equipment has re-assumed an elitist value in recent years. Whether this reflects a perceived class- or gender-affirming set of meanings in the objects, or a devolution from consumer good to unique hand-crafted item is unclear at this point, but the implications in either case are tantalizing.
 12. As many have noted, there was an incredible concatenation of major changes that affected virtually all aspects of North American culture in the decades surrounding the turn of the century. In the present context, we can mention Freudian/Jungian psychoanalysis, the Cult of Youth, the mania for fitness and cleanliness, and the rise of mass merchandising and advertising.
 13. Kathy Peiss, "Making Up, Making Over: Cosmetics, Consumer Culture and Women's Identity," in *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective*, ed. Victoria de Grazia with Ellen Furlough (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 312.
 14. *Ibid.*, 320. This change was perhaps best epitomized by Warren I. Susman in *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984) as the transformation from an ideal of "character" to one of "personality." The notion has had enormous implications for twentieth-century thought and may be said to have spawned entire fields such as symbolic interactionism, performance analysis and social behavioralism. See in particular George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self and Society from the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934) and Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1959); also Arthur Asa Berger, *Reading Matter: Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Material Culture* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1992); Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, "Why We Need Things," in Lubar, *History from Things*, 20–29; Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton, *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Stephen H. Riggins, ed., *Beyond Goffman: Studies on Communication, Institution, and Social Interaction* (New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1990); Gregory P. Stone, "Appearance and the Self," *Human Behavior and Social Processes: An Interactionist Approach*, ed. Arnold M. Rose (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962), 86–118.
 15. Jack Solomon, *The Signs of Our Times: The Secret Meanings of Everyday Life* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 174.
 16. John T. Molloy, *New Dress for Success*, rev. ed. of *Dress for Success* (1975), (New York: Warner Books, 1988), 198.
 17. Mary Spillane, *Presenting Yourself: A Personal Image Guide for Men* (London: Judy Piatkus, 1994), 104. Both Spillane and Molloy (see preceding note) go on to make an exception in the case of men who have "weak chins" and "need" to hide them. Advice books for men are considerably fewer in number than those for women, and focus more heavily on clothing than on grooming, but all contain some reference to the matter of facial hair. Note that Mary Spillane is a professional British image consultant who counts among her clientele such companies as Sears, Boots, British Airways and Shell.
 18. I would suggest, in fact, that the beard today serves to signify its owner as an "outsider," someone who is either above or beyond the need to conform to social standards. This includes, on the one hand, members of the cultural elite — artists, philosophers and writers such as Robertson Davies. At the other end of the scale, twentieth-century visual and textual rhetoric often associates "beardedness" with rebellious or revolutionary personalities. For example, the phrase "bearded hippy" still enjoys wide circulation, even though contemporary photographs suggest that beards were not at all a common phenomenon in the Woodstock days.
 19. Kubler, *The Shape of Time*, 38. In this highly influential book, the art historian elucidates the principles and analytic potentials of the idea of formal sequences, and includes one model of how "meaning" is transmitted over time through objects.
 20. Roland Barthes, "Semantics of the Object," (1964; reprinted in *The Semiotic Challenge*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang (A Division of Farrar, Straus and Giroux), 1988), 182. See also Roland Barthes, *The Fashion System* (1967), trans. Matthew Ward and Richard Howard (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990); Arthur Asa Berger, *Signs in Contemporary Culture: An Introduction to Semiotics* (New York: Longman, 1984); Jacques Maquet, "Objects as Instruments, Objects as Signs," in Lubar, *History from Things*, 30–40; Susan M. Pearce, "Objects as Signs and Symbols," *Museums Journal* 85 (December 1986): 131–135. The distinction between form and function has also been shown to inform the way we perceive and interpret objects in Robert E. Klein III and Jerome B. Kernan, "Contextual Influences on the Meanings Ascribed to Ordinary Consumption Objects," *Journal of Consumer Research* 8, no. 3 (December 1991), 311–324.
 21. The sample used in this study comprised some thirty-five individual razors examined directly, and including at least three items from each of the

- principal categories, as follows: straight razors (8), disposable blades (4), re-usable blades (3), disposable cartridge (7), disposable razors (5), oscillating electric (4), rotary electric (4). This physical sample was augmented with a visual comparison to a wide selection of pictorial representations drawn from supply- and mail-order catalogues and from media advertising, as well as related material drawn from the Web, notably the home pages of the major razor manufacturers and several pages devoted to shaving. Since the focus of this study is on the visible, external design elements of the objects, and none of these sources revealed any additional basic styles of razor, it was felt that the above sampling represented an adequate data base.
22. A new model of "wet/dry" razors has appeared on the market very recently, too late to be included in this analysis. If it does in fact represent a valid convergence of the two historical sequences, the model described in this paper will undoubtedly require substantial modification.
 23. For an extremely good description of the construction, variations and maintenance techniques involved in the use of a straight razor, see Moler, *The Barber's Manual*.
 24. Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899; reprint, New York: Dover Publications, 1994). The results of the present study suggest that razors provide a potentially useful way to demonstrate the evolution of consumer practices from the "trickle-down" model to mass-market consumerism. The wide-spread use of barbers has been well documented, and references are found in several travel journals. On the use of private servants, I would suggest that an examination of shaving basins points to the reliance on a second party to perform the shave, a conclusion that is supported by contemporary cartoons and illustrations. The democratization and privatization of shaving is not the least of the changes remarked upon in the present study, and is reflected in the drastic reduction in expensive razor models made explicitly for the wealthier classes. For a recent critique and rehabilitation of Simmel's "Trickle-down Theory," see Grant McCracken, *Culture and Consumption: New Approaches to the Symbolic Character of Consumer Goods and Activities* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), 93-103.
 25. Ritchie and Stewart, *Standard Guide to Razors*, 29.
 26. There is a wide range of razors that fit this category, such as the "Valet Auto-Strop" and the famous Rolls Razor. While all of these were and are considered safety razors like the Gillette model, and were often presented as direct competition, they differed in the important respect that the blades still required whetting and honing. What made the Gillette razor so different and so influential was the use of a disposable blade, which rendered the entire shaving system vastly easier to deal with, as well as within the economic reach of everyone.
 27. This issue is covered at length in Adams, *King C. Gillette*, 96-123 and *passim*. The British and Canadian forces apparently made the same decision, as reported in H. E. Stephenson and Carlton McNaught, *The Story of Advertising in Canada: A Chronicle of the Fifty Years* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1940), 206-210.
 28. Thomas J. Schlereth, "Conduits and Conduct: Home Utilities in Victorian America, 1876-1915," in *American Home Life, 1880-1930: A Social History of Spaces and Services*, ed. Jessica H. Foy and Thomas J. Schlereth (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992), 225-241. The influence of indoor plumbing and electricity on our habits and perceptions is a potentially fertile area for further analysis of the kind suggested here.
 29. Adrian Forty, *Objects of Desire: Design and Society Since 1750* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1992), 182-206. In this intriguing analysis, Forty suggest that the design of early appliances was driven by the manufacturers' desire to promote public acceptance for the new goods. This implies a high level of intentionality to the design process, and ignores the possibility that the designs reflected their creators' own idea of what images were appropriate.
 30. Duane Swierczynski, "Take It Off the Chin," *Men's Health* 12, no. 5 (June 1997): 129.
 31. Precise figures are difficult to locate. Sales of electric shavers account for about thirty per cent of the annual revenues from razor sales (Boyles and Stebben *A Man's Life*, 133.) Given their relative individual cost this amounts to a very small fraction of all items sold annually. However, since electric shavers last many years, the total proportion of users will be considerably higher.
 32. Additional technological enhancements to the blades themselves have occurred throughout the century, such as the development of the stainless steel blade, fused "twin blades," Teflon coatings and flexible cartridges. I have intentionally omitted these sub-types because they do not significantly affect the overall design or shape of the razors.
 33. One of the models examined was in fact purchased new by a respondent's father in 1956, and retained as the sole memento of this family's male role model — a suggestive if not conclusive indication of the association that exists between the concept of "razor" and the concept of "man."
 34. There is considerable anecdotal evidence to suggest that women have long been accustomed to appropriating men's razors for their own use. One male respondent commented that he always bought his wife a bag of disposable razors at Christmas so she would stop using his, and he chose the "woman's" version so they would be distinguishable from his, rather than because of any innate gender associations. From this perspective, what is important is the *fact* of difference, rather than the *nature* of that difference. On the other hand, a female user of safety razors proudly gave her niece a "woman's" model as a gift in honour of reaching puberty, in order to "welcome" her to adult womanhood. (Paul Boehlen (December 1996), and Oris Retallack (May 1997) in conversation with the author.) The strong gender associations of razors also explains why electric shavers in particular are frequently used for cross-gender gift giving.
 35. Forty, *Objects of Desire*, 66. Oddly, Forty makes no mention of the most obvious difference between these models — their overall shape.

36. Michael Tambini, *The Look of the Century* (Willowdale, Ontario: Firefly Books, 1996), 102.
37. By "intentionality," I do not mean to suggest these design decisions are necessarily conscious ones. In fact, quite the opposite seems probable — that these choices are *unconscious* expressions of a normative cultural value-set, and accordingly appear to be "only natural."
38. Kenneth L. Ames, "Meaning in Artifacts: Hall Furnishings in Victorian America," in Schlereth, *Material Culture Studies*, 208.
39. Victoria de Grazia "Introduction," in de Grazia, *The Sex of Things*, 8.
40. Klein III and Kernan, "Contextual Influences," 312.
41. Of particular value here is Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity 1920-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), notably the section on "The Parable of the First Impression," 208-217. See also William Leiss, Stephen King and Sut Jhally, *Social Communication in Advertising: Persons, Products and Images of Well-being*, 2nd ed. (Scarborough, Ontario: Nelson Canada, 1990).
42. T. Eaton Company, *Spring/Summer Catalogue*, 1936, 186.
43. Adams, *King C. Gillette*, 91-92.
44. For a brief summary of these conflicted attitudes, see Russell W. Belk and Richard W. Pollay, "Images of Ourselves: The Good Life in Twentieth Century Advertising," *Journal of Consumer Research* 11, no. 4 (March 1985): 887-897. Probably the most popular and famous of the scare-mongering analyses is Wilson Bryan Key, *Subliminal Seduction: Ad Media's Manipulation of a Not So Innocent America* (New York: Penguin Books/Signet, 1981), although much of Marshall McLuhan's work, such as *The Mechanical Bride* (New York: The Vanguard Press, 1951) now also appears to carry more than a bit of paranoia about the manipulative capacity of advertising.
45. For the material in this section, I have relied heavily on the works of Marian Dingen, *The Creation of Meaning in Advertising: Interaction of Figurative Advertising and Individual Differences in Processing Styles* (Amsterdam: Thesis Publishers, 1994); Erving Goffman, *Gender Advertisements*, Harper Colophon Edition, introduction by Vivian Gornick (New York: Harper & Row, 1979); and particularly Judith Williamson, *Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising* (London: Marion Boyars, 1978).
46. Williamson, *Decoding Advertisements*, 25.
47. Dingen, *Creation of Meaning*, 15.
48. The observations made in this section are based on a preliminary analysis of 137 shaving advertisements that appeared between 1898 and 1998. The sample was about evenly divided between print and television ads, and included twelve ads for women's products. Every item examined included a picture of the product, and approximately seventy per cent also showed the intended user, most often portrayed in the act of shaving.
49. Some ads featuring African-Americans were uncovered in the pages of "special-interest" magazines such as *Ebony*, but only one such example was found in mainstream publications, and none at all in North American television advertising.
50. In the interest of brevity, only men's advertising has been considered in this section, but many of the observations made will apply equally to ads directed towards women.
51. By "positive public images" I am referring to representations of North American males as displayed in the mass media since 1918. I do not include negatively presented images of any kind, nor any "historical" fictional characters, since these are often shown as bearded for reasons of artistic verisimilitude.
52. For a review of Gillette's long and profitable association with the sports world, see Adams, *King C. Gillette* and Albert S. Leonard, "Gillette's Cavalcade of Sports Rode Early Boom in Broadcasting World Series, Boxing Classics," *Advertising Age* 44, no. 3 (22 October 1973). On the issue of celebrity endorsements as a style of advertising see Terry L. Childers and Akshay R. Rao, "The Influence of Familial and Peer-based Reference Groups on Consumer Decisions," *Journal of Consumer Research* 19, no. 2 (September 1992): 198-211, and Grant McCracken, "Who is the Celebrity Endorser? Cultural Foundations of the Endorsement Process," *Journal of Consumer Research* 16, no. 3 (December 1989): 310-321.
53. McCracken, *Culture and Consumption*, 74.
54. Some crucial differences between public and private activities are discussed in Childers and Rao, "Influence of Familial and Peer-based Reference Groups." Although some work has been done on public grooming such as the beauty salon, the area of private grooming has received virtually no attention at all. Interestingly, if the Childers and Rao model is accurate, then the current study suggests that shaving has been transformed in this century from a "public luxury" to a "private necessity."
55. Dennis W. Rook, "The Ritual Dimension of Consumer Behavior," *Journal of Consumer Research* 12, no. 3 (December 1985): 260.
56. I have relied heavily on the work of Grant McCracken and Dennis Rook in developing these ideas. While I think both authors fail to take their analyses far enough, the models they propose stand almost alone in the field, and warrant careful consideration.
57. This assertion is based on the admittedly informal observation that most men always shave in the same sequence, that is, right cheek, left cheek, chin, etc. This sequence can vary substantially from one person to the next, but that it tends to exist in most cases supports the ritualistic assessment posited here.
58. One exception to the rule is shaving in the car. While not a particularly wide-spread practice, it is a routine for many men, especially those with particularly heavy beards. It is also still possible, barely, to get a shave at some barbershops.
59. Peiss, "Making Up, Making Over," 313. In this provocative essay, Peiss shows how the development of the idea of self as a constructed rather than fixed identity was reflected by the changing use of cosmetics from their use in "hiding the true self" to being a means of actively defining that self as circumstance and desire dictates. The importance of the face as a key component of identity

creation may explain why shaving appears to be more closely identified with men than women. Women shave areas of the body to which far less importance is attached socially than the face. And because this is so, women do not commonly use a mirror when shaving, thus reducing the importance of the "other" — the audience — in the process. In the context of this argument, this suggests that shaving is far less ritualistic for women than for men, and also less central to the

construction of their self-definition. It is not in shaving that we find a female counterpart to the daily shave, but in the application of makeup. In the latter case, the ritual elements discussed above are all present: the mirror, the sequence, the implements and the "other," constructed self. See also Gordon L. Patzer, *The Physical Attractiveness Phenomenon* (New York: Plenum Press, 1985).

60. Williamson, *Decoding Advertisements*, 68.