

Styling Gender

FROM BARBER SHOPS AND LADIES' HAIRDRESSERS TO THE UNISEX SALON, 1920-1970



THE SUBJECT OF BEAUTY has troubled feminist scholars and historians of gender. Some have seen it as the cause of any number of women's woes, from compulsive shopping to anorexia, part of a set of cultural conventions that differentiate men and women to the detriment of women. Others claim that beauty culture has forwarded women's entrepreneurial interests (think of Helena Rubenstein, for example) as well as enhancing respectability and providing a source of playful pleasure.¹ Whatever stance commentators take, none can deny that during the twentieth century the beauty business burgeoned. Our aim here is to examine the two sites where stylists and clients met: barber shops and hairdressing salons. Changes in these workplaces echo wider social transformations relating to women and men and their interest in appearance.

For the first half of the twentieth century, in John Berger's words, men were to 'act' and women 'appear'. Women's appearance was crucially important to their success whereas men's work defined them.² This historically specific division — a 'real man' was apparently unconcerned with fashion or his looks while a 'real woman' paid a great deal of attention to her appearance — was mirrored in the spaces in which hairstyling was enacted. Always an unstable dichotomy, threatened by styles of the counterculture, the consensus over masculinity and femininity broke apart in the 1960s as the baby boom generation, critical of their elders, adopted novel styles. Unisex salons emerged to accommodate newly stylish men alongside women.

Hairstyling was 'one of the most pervasive forms of beauty work' available to women and men.³ During the twentieth century major changes occurred in the way hair was managed, and who was involved in its management. Women adopted short hair in the 1920s, and later, in the 1960s, men began to grow their hair longer. At the beginning of the period, male barbers knew how to cut hair, and did so in specialist shops, called saloons, unlike ladies' hairdressers who 'dressed' long hair rather than cut it, often within their clients' homes. In the 1920s ladies' hairdressing increasingly moved to salons, female spaces distinct from the saloons where men's hair was cut. In salons hairdressers combined an ethos of care and an interest in feminine attractiveness with

business acumen. The salons existed alongside a continuing tradition of do-it-yourself hair care, including home hair dyeing, setting, waving, washing and cutting.⁴ In time, these independent businesswomen established their ascendancy in the trade, overtaking male hairdressers. In 1921 over 92% of hairdressers were men. By 1976 nearly 80% were women.⁵ The whole culture of separate male and female hairdressing spaces was reconfigured and a transformation in a personal service occurred. What did this change mean, and how was it experienced on the saloon or salon floor?

Ever needed but little noted, hairdressers have been largely absent from the historical record in the way that women were at the time of Raewyn Dalziel's path-breaking article, 'The Colonial Helpmeet'. She suggested that the emphasis in late-nineteenth-century New Zealand was on women's role within the home and family, as guardians of 'moral health'.⁶ A person who cuts hair can also be seen as a kind of 'helpmeet', usually unacknowledged and taken for granted, who women and men have relied upon to help them present a particular kind of face to the world. An examination of the barber's saloon and the ladies' hairdresser salon provides insights into the changing performance of masculinity and femininity from the 1920s to the 1960s, just as Dalziel's examination of suffrage posited that particular understandings of gender gave rise to the enfranchisement of women. We might only note Kate Sheppard's respectable demeanour, hair neatly drawn back into a bun, to realize how important appearance was to the suffrage campaign.

'Like fashion and dress', Geraldine Biddle-Perry and Sarah Cheang assert, 'hair can be situated as a fundamental part of 'the means by which bodies are made and given meaning and identity'.⁷ While New Zealand historians have not paid much attention to hair, hairdressing or barbering, a growing interest in questions of style, consumerism, the body and fashion is evident in the publications of recent decades. Jane Malthus's 1989 'Bifurcated and Not Ashamed' article indicated the centrality of the politics of dress to late-nineteenth-century feminists.⁸ Many of the good kiwi blokes described in Jock Phillips's *A Man's Country* regularly visited a clipper-wielding barber.⁹ A photograph of a long-haired 1970s couple is Barbara Brookes's starting point to consider the impact of feminism on men in that decade.¹⁰ Brookes's analysis of Germaine Greer's 1972 visit to New Zealand also addresses questions of style.¹¹ New Zealand women's responses to Christian Dior's 'new look' are the subject of Chris Brickell's discussion of fashion and resistance in post-war New Zealand.¹² Fashion was once viewed as a historical triviality; historians are now looking intently at fashions in self-presentation as revealing of cultural identities.¹³

As the cost of illustrating books has fallen, photographs have become more plentiful in historical texts and it has become easier to trace the shadowy history of hair, particularly in the emerging history of fashion. The excitement of cultural history is conveyed in Bronwyn Dalley and Brownwyn Labrum's 2000 collection, *Fragments: New Zealand Cultural and Social History*, which included Fiona McKergow's 'Opening the Wardrobe of History'.¹⁴ Dalley's *Living in the Twentieth Century: New Zealand History in Photographs* made the visual central to the history, as does Chris Brickell's *Mates and Lovers: A History of Gay New Zealand*.¹⁵ Caroline Daley's work analysing changing bodily styles reveals much about New Zealand's past.¹⁶ In *Looking Flash*, a collection of essays about clothing, authors attended to the meanings of clothing for personal identity and as an aspect of wider social forces. While hairstyles go unremarked upon in the text, the photographs in the volume are indicative of hair's importance as a social signifier.¹⁷ One of the editors of that volume, Bronwyn Labrum, paid more attention to hair in her *Real Modern: Every Day New Zealand in the 1950s and 1960s*.¹⁸ The numerous illustrations in that book, and in others such as *Blue Smoke: The Lost Dawn of New Zealand Popular Music 1918-1964*, *Changing Times: New Zealand since 1945*, *Tangata Whenua: An Illustrated History* and *A History of New Zealand Women*, give visual evidence of remarkable change in styles over time.¹⁹

For a good deal of the twentieth century, hair was done in spaces described as having a 'masculine' or a 'feminine' atmosphere as if the very air inside was gendered. Men and women sought different experiences in attending to their hair. Just how those experiences were structured gives insights into the meanings of masculinity and femininity in this era. In the barbershop functionality prevailed: the no-nonsense, conformist cuts dispensed therein resembled the sameness and practicality of the shops themselves. In contrast, just as female clients sought variety and individuality in their hairstyles, the proprietors of women's salons vied to create different and alluring decors, selling their services partly on their operators' reputation for creativity and flair. Ladies' salons helped shape particular versions of femininity, from the 'bob' of the 1920s, to the perms, beehives and blunt cuts of succeeding decades. Within the salons women took pleasure in the personal services provided at a time when mothers, in particular, were the providers of personal services for others. Whereas women might seek to call attention to their appearance, men who did so were likely to be regarded as effeminate. 'Male "vanity" went into hiding'.²⁰ Men's hairstyles were uniform and could be requested by number according to the length of the clipper ('a number three please'). The barber shop service was rapid and — the pleasures of a good haircut and a close shave notwithstanding — less personal.

During the first two-thirds of the twentieth century a man's respectability could be judged by the length of his hair and the state of his whiskers. To appear decent a fellow required neat and tidy hair and a clean shave. Beards and moustaches, once common, became regarded as unhygienic, a likely gathering place for germs.²¹ No doubt the mass recruitment of men for the First World War led to a more uniform look as heads were shorn to keep lice at bay. Until the 1960s, men's hair, in Grant McCracken's words, was 'anti-transformational'; long hair was unquestionably feminine.²² The barber shop transaction was straightforward, the hair was cut, no shampooing was involved. Haircuts were generally simple and cheap, with minimal variation.²³ Customers returned, usually fortnightly, to get the same cut.²⁴ Men were said not to like barbers who tried to force a new style on them or failed to memorize the set of the hair before they started cutting.²⁵ 'You'd ask them if they wanted some more off the top or something like that, cut a wee bit shorter. But otherwise they'd have the same.'²⁶

Barber shop shaving, a traditional service, was undercut as the twentieth century progressed. The Gillette safety razor, patented in 1901 but not produced until 1903, had advantages of speed, convenience and safety over the traditional 'cut-throat' razor and dramatically reduced barbers' role in shaving.²⁷ The safety razor was in general use in New Zealand by 1912, although some men continued to use the cut-throat blade for much longer.²⁸ Self-shaving increased in popularity during World War One.²⁹ Following the lead of the United States, the Gillette razor became standard issue in the British Army in 1920.³⁰ By 1936, the safety razor was said to have 'supplanted long trousers as a symbol of manhood', though as with many symbols of manhood there were socio-economic and generational variations.³¹ A dispute between male hairdressers and their employers in 1938 led to an explanation of the situation in Dunedin:

[A] few years ago, and before safety razors were commonly used a great many people patronised hairdressers for shaving. Since the safety razor has become commonly used, however, the number of factory workers who patronise hairdressers for shaving is very small. They patronise hairdressers for haircutting, and with this class of customer most of the shaving is done in conjunction with haircutting. A man goes to a barber for a hair-cut and he gets a shave at the same time, but he does not get another shave from the barber until he has his hair cut again. The safety razor functions between times.³²

While most factory workers had a shave only when they went for a haircut, many businessmen stopped in at the barber every morning on their way to work for a shave. William Allan described the people he shaved as 'probably the upper class more so than John Citizen'. Later on his main shaving customers were elderly gentlemen who were 'getting a bit shaky

in the hand'.³³ Des Branks remembered the managing director of the local freezing works never shaved himself and came in every morning at a quarter to nine for a shave.³⁴

Barber shops were distinctive thanks to the red, white and blue stripes of the barber pole. The pole announced the location of a male enclave. Advertisements for cigarettes often crowded the windows, and inside photographs of sports teams and racehorses lined the walls.³⁵ Barber shop proprietors emphasized practicality and hygiene in their open-plan saloons to create a masculine atmosphere. Some went further in the quest to give their saloon the desired 'personality'.³⁶ An Auckland barber, a Mr Cornish, invited men who called in for cigarettes or a haircut to inspect his 'chamber of horrors' that included 'a horse's skull, a bullock's horn, some kangaroo claws and a pig's tusk'.³⁷ Hairdressing saloons were open-plan places of sociability; the 'masculine atmosphere' was filled with talk about sport, current affairs, anecdotes and tradesman's tips.³⁸ Some saloons kept the radio tuned to sports programmes all day. Sports and racing magazines were sold in the shop.³⁹ Many barbers were involved in sports and often cut the hair of those from the sports clubs to which they belonged. Ernest Asher, for example, was a hairdresser for 50 years, latterly in an Auckland High Street shop. A fine rugby player, instrumental in forming a Māori team to tour Australia in 1908, he converted to rugby league and was involved in the game throughout his life at the highest levels as a player and then in administration. His sporting interests, which included weightlifting, were often shared by his clients.⁴⁰ Des Branks regarded it as 'essential' for a hairdresser to 'know something about sports'. William Allan's saloon was located in Kaikorai Valley, a suburb of Dunedin, and therefore everyone in the saloon supported any Kaikorai sports teams or other events:

You had to have a line of conversation. Sports, your football, cricket, everything that was going on in the district was a topic in the district. You had to be verse[d] with that, keep up with that so that you could discuss these different topics intelligently . . . and then there was always the hairdresser's different stories that he had to tell. Little wee anecdotes, [to] keep your customers amused.⁴¹

Barbers were enjoined to personify 'manly beauty'. Neat clothes, clean hands and nails, tidy hair and a clean-shaven face were essential. Achieving 'manly beauty' involved a delicate balance: barbers needed to look presentable without appearing too preoccupied with appearance. 'Let your dress be quiet, neat and not too fashionable', advised their trade publication, the *Hairdressers' and Retail Tobacconists Review*.⁴² A barber's 'ordinary clothes should accord with the general tenor of the profession; that is to

say, whilst avoiding the severe, he must dress neatly, always avoiding the flamboyant'.⁴³ Flamboyance might suggest flirtation with homosexuality, or a sexual ambiguity out of place in a shop designed to reinforce hegemonic masculinity.

Sociability at the barber's was enhanced through regular contact. Men might have little choice in the barber shop they patronized, in small towns in particular, but barbers knew it was important that customers should feel comfortable. Because most saloons were one-man businesses, the shop revolved around the personality of the barber; he determined the shop's 'character'. 'The atmosphere of a hairdressing business', advised the *Review*, 'is not altogether created by its fittings and fixtures, as many of us think. It is created by the people in it. What they do and say and how they say and do it will make a world of difference.'⁴⁴ Customers were usually regulars.⁴⁵ According to Gordon Knowles and William Allan, you could set the clock by each man's fortnightly arrival at the barber shop. Clients were retained for decades, sometimes right up until they died.⁴⁶ Our interviewees explained they had a mixture of types of customers, from many different backgrounds. Managers, professionals, boys and workers would visit the same saloon, although often at different times of the day.⁴⁷ To emphasize the variety of clients, Des Branks mentioned the Chinese men whose hair he cut.⁴⁸ The location of a shop affected the composition of the clientele. When Douglas Cramond worked in Port Chalmers his main customers were blue-collar workers, but in central Dunedin he had more professional and business people.⁴⁹ The intimacy created over the years led a retiring Christchurch hairdresser to comment 'this has been more in the nature of a club than a shop'.⁵⁰ Cramond underlined the male exclusivity of the 'club'. In 1930s Port Chalmers men thought of the barber shop as a male sanctuary: 'if they saw a woman in the salon, they'd just walk out again. They wouldn't sit down because there was [sic] women sitting waiting. They'd get embarrassed.'⁵¹

Men may have been embarrassed by the presence of women because they had come for more than just a haircut. Early barber shops sometimes incorporated billiards rooms.⁵² Gambling was another possible activity. Many male hairdressers sold tobacco openly and condoms and other sexually explicit material covertly. Tobacco fumes and the smell of shaving soap created the scent of the 'masculine atmosphere' which fostered debates about the merits of particular horses and sports teams. 'The small barber shop should be masculine enough to make men feel at ease while waiting a turn in the chair', advised the *Review*.⁵³

Cigarette smoke played a vital role in creating the barber shop's masculine feel. Hairdressing saloons sold cigarettes and tobacco, and provided ashtrays

so customers could smoke while they waited.⁵⁴ Douglas Cramond and William Allan actively encouraged smoking in their shops to boost trade.⁵⁵ Smoking was a social activity. According to Gordon Knowles, 'nine out of ten' men smoked: 'They used to give them away. The practice was, open your packet and hand them around.'⁵⁶ The *Review* denied any health risks from smoking and promoted tobacco by celebrating the occasion when 5000 men lit up a cigarette during a rugby match in Christchurch in 1934. That same year, Lincoln College held a race involving students running through an obstacle course while smoking.⁵⁷ Pipe tobacco fumes also pervaded the barber shop. A man smoking his pipe, according to the *Review*, was 'a MAN, indeed. A man is a connoisseur only when selecting his tobacco. All this makes the pipe a man's last bulwark.'⁵⁸ The Hairdressers and Retail Tobacconists' Federation held a Smoke-A-Pipe week in 1961 and hailed the masculinity of pipe smokers throughout that decade.⁵⁹

While smoking was not thought dangerous, betting offered men a ritual where they weighed up risks and rewards. Barbers had taken bets on horse races since the nineteenth century, and although the practice was outlawed in 1908 they continued to do so illegally. During the 1930s the *Review* reported several instances of barbers being fined for keeping betting houses in their shops.⁶⁰ A hairdresser arrested in 1955 turned over £1000 each race day. The establishment of the Totaliser Agency Board legalized off-course betting in 1950, which meant the end of many full-time bookies, but part-time bookies like barbers retained a niche by taking bets on credit, small bets and late bets.⁶¹

Men who craved an instant fortune could buy tickets in the Australian lottery, Tatterstalls, or the New Zealand lottery, the Art Union, at the saloon. Tatterstalls set up a clandestine system of agents in New Zealand in 1896. Many hairdressers and tobacconists had the sign 'we post to Hobart' (where Tatterstalls was based) in their shops. In 1905 an estimated £250,000 worth of Tatts tickets were sold in New Zealand.⁶² Overseas lotteries were specifically banned in 1907, yet Tatts tickets continued to be sold, since they offered bigger prizes than any New Zealand lottery.⁶³ In 1935 Vivian Jacobs, a Dunedin hairdresser, was convicted and fined for selling a Tatts ticket to an undercover policeman. He appealed his conviction and won on the basis that he had not actually sold the ticket, but had merely sent a request for a ticket to Tasmania and accepted a commission for providing this service.⁶⁴ After this case, overseas lottery tickets could be sold without fear of prosecution. From 1961, New Zealand's 'Golden Kiwi' lottery offered substantial prizes.

For men who did not want to gamble in their sex lives, barber shops offered condoms for sale. According to Douglas Cramond, all the men in Port

Chalmers, a predominantly working-class community dominated by wharfies and seamen, bought condoms from him because the local chemist, who also sold condoms, had only female assistants and men were too embarrassed to buy condoms from women.⁶⁵ Des Branks said that selling condoms was very lucrative but that he had to give it up when he got a female assistant in the shop since the men were too embarrassed to buy contraceptives from her. He also blamed the introduction of the contraceptive pill in 1961 for the decline in that trade. Emphasizing the respectability of male hairdressers, he explained that married men were the main purchasers of condoms.⁶⁶ Not all were convinced that the trade was controlled. Women's organizations, concerned that the availability of condoms would promote juvenile delinquency, prompted the Justice Minister to write to the New Zealand Hairdressers' and Retail Tobacconists' Federation in 1956 asking barbers not to display contraceptives openly.⁶⁷ The Housewives' Union, the Women's Christian Temperance Union and the National Council of Women wanted to prohibit the sale of condoms from pie carts, milk bars and saloons.⁶⁸ No doubt they would have also disapproved of the pornographic postcards and risqué magazines on sale in some barber shops.⁶⁹ A Petone policeman combined getting a haircut with 'observations of ten-year-old boys sneaking a look at ladies in "men's" magazines like *Razzle* and *Squire*'.⁷⁰

The male space of the barber shop provided a convivial atmosphere where men could discuss their interests and have their haircut in conformity with the established norm. There they could buy Brylcreem, ubiquitous from the 1930s, 'Hendy's Bay Rum' and 'Quinine Hair Lotion', said to prevent baldness, as well as fishing tackle, cigarettes, sports magazines and condoms, safe in the knowledge that no woman was appraising their purchases. But for a short time, after the First World War, that male sanctum was invaded. In the 1920s a lightning strike hit the male atmosphere. Young women entered barber shops to have their long hair cut off into the newly fashionable 'bob' or 'shingle'. Some modern women also wished to purchase cigarettes as a symbol of their novel ability to explore previously male pleasures.

As young women increased their participation in shops and offices, they had both the desire and the means to embark on adventures in style. A cropped head symbolized the modern woman, no longer weighed down by long tresses, but it could also be a target for criticism. The press associated the new styles with mannish activities such as motorcycling and smoking.⁷¹ Some could not contain their outrage at the new fashion. In 1923 the *Ladies' Mirror* reported that the middle-class members of women's clubs 'almost unanimously' disapproved of bobbed hair.⁷² A flapper, the *New Zealand Free Lance* claimed, was a form of 'he-male, who through having her hair shingled

has a face as hard as any man's and a neck with bristles'.⁷³ By 1925, the *Ladies' Mirror* had come around and declared that short hair was 'hygienic and comfortable'.⁷⁴ Older women took to the convenience of short hair, the novelty of women's short hair wore off, and the controversy died down.

Shorter hairstyles created a need for women to get more frequent haircuts. Some barbers turned to ladies' hairdressing, creating new venues with a 'feminine atmosphere', but women were more likely to specialize in creating a new type of beauty culture. The invasion of the hair saloon, dramatic, controversial and short-lived as it was, disturbed the air and brought about a change of climate. Between 1921 and 1936, the number of lady hairdressers in New Zealand expanded rapidly, from 100 to 1500. The number of male hairdressers also increased, but not so dramatically, from 1200 to 2200. Many employers enlarged their shops to accommodate a ladies' section parallel to the gents' section. Henty's, a prominent Dunedin shop, was only one of a number of establishments that converted from men's to women's hairdressing in 1926.⁷⁵ Women now had a place to go where their style needs were paramount.

Salons developed in the 1920s in response to women's demand for a new look. They promised transformation of the self. 'The most homely girl', suggested the *Ladies' Mirror* in 1925, 'can go behind the clinging, perfumed portiers [sic] of the beauty parlour with a full purse and dull eyes. Two hours later she may emerge moneyless but radiant with a complexion of the proverbial peaches and cream, eyes that sparkle and hair that is lustrous and carefully coifed'.⁷⁶ During the interwar years ladies' hairdressers learned new cutting and styling techniques and adopted new technology to create permanent waves. Such skills enabled them to charge more for their services, and, unlike barbers, they did not have to supplement their income by selling items apart from hair products. They might, however, provide additional beauty services: the removal of unwanted facial hair (through electrolysis or wax treatments), facials, make-up and manicures.⁷⁷ More women were earning their own wage and some were prepared to invest their extra income at the hairdressers. In 1925, the *Ladies' Mirror* claimed that 'the girl who earns her own living more often than not spends her Saturday afternoons and a goodly part of her week's salary in the beauty parlour'.⁷⁸ Professional women often had their hair done at lunchtime, while nurses and shop girls used to come into Vera Everett's Dunedin salon before work.⁷⁹ On Friday afternoons, women workers flocked to Alan Judson's Gore and then Dunedin salons to get their hair styled for the weekend.⁸⁰

Salons competed for custom through alluring décor. Creating a 'feminine atmosphere' demanded attention to colour and decoration. The *Hairdressers'*

Journal reported on models worthy of emulation. The Laurette Salon, 'tastefully decorated in a pale pink shade', had 'modern chrome chairs, pedestal basins and beautiful dual chrome taps'.⁸¹ A particularly striking lime green colour scheme adorned the waiting lounge of the Fashionette Salon. The cushioned satin walls were inset with gold studs and vases for flowers. Two red leather-covered doors formed the entrance to the main salon, where the green ceiling contrasted with mauve walls ornamented with murals of Auckland scenes. The cubicles, divided by cyclamen plastic curtains, each featured a different colour, and red, yellow and grey flooring added to the riot of colour.⁸² Kay's Salon had 'contemporary furniture, rich thick carpets and artistically-arranged flowers'.⁸³ Cameos graced the Isles and Poole cubicle doors, two of which were decorated in pink, two in green and two in cream. Large plaster casts dominated the walls.⁸⁴ 'Solid blocks of colour were used for effect' in Olwen Rae's Invercargill salon. Having observed the trends in Auckland, Rae prided herself that her black ceiling and red and green feature walls were 'all the fashion'.⁸⁵

Hairdressers' personal appearance enhanced the feminine ambience. The staff's regular perms and up-to-the-minute cuts functioned as persuasive advertisements of their skills.⁸⁶ A hairdresser had to have good personal hygiene, a neat appearance, hands and nails in good condition, make-up properly applied and clean overalls.⁸⁷ Some salons had uniforms that were fashionable as well as tidy.⁸⁸ Vera Everett chose floral uniforms for herself and her staff because they looked 'lovely and fresh and they were very smart'.⁸⁹ Hairdressers made it their business to follow fashion magazines and advised their customers on clothing as well as hairstyles.⁹⁰ Women trusted the judgment of Howard Sinclair and his staff, taking dresses about which they wanted a second opinion to try on in the salon.⁹¹ When hairdressers were admitted to the Incorporated Society of London Designers in 1957 the *Journal* regarded it as overdue recognition of their importance in the world of fashion.⁹²

Hairdressing competitions reinforced hairdressers' links with the fashion industry, and hence with femininity. It is no coincidence that the modern site of feminine consumption *par excellence*, a department store, hosted New Zealand's first hairdressing competition in 1947. Freshly coiffed models paraded down a catwalk in Dunedin's DIC department store in front of an admiring crowd. A hundred people attended the evening ball, surrounded by 'glamorous damsels', when the prizes were presented.⁹³ Two years later, 800 people attended Auckland's hairdressing ball.⁹⁴ Great excitement and glamour surrounded the competitions and the balls. The highlight was the fantasy parade, when hair was dressed with diamanté ornaments, flowers

and glitter dust.⁹⁵ 'A series of fantastic hairstyles, each more glamorous, impractical and amusing than the last' drew the crowds in 1953.⁹⁶ Two years later a local flight of fantasy led to an aerial top-dressing hairstyle which involved a helicopter with flashing lights.⁹⁷ Hairdressing competitions, like debutante balls and beauty contests, 'served to draw attention to a sense of femininity as achievement, at the same time as they worked to contain and limit how it was understood'.⁹⁸ While few women wished to emulate the impractical hairstyles of the fantasy competition, they sought out hairdressers who had done well, believing that, in doing so, they would be at the forefront of fashion.

Initially salons were designed to give clients privacy. Separate cubicles ensured that women were not seen with wet or messy hair or in pin curls and a net.⁹⁹ The equation between respectability and personal neatness meant that women did not wish to be seen with dishevelled hair. Each client entered a small space enclosed by walls or curtains to have their hair done. Hairdressers were cautioned: 'The moment the curtain is drawn and the woman is seated, remember that she is shut into a small, bright, self-contained world.'¹⁰⁰ Ideally the client was seated in a comfortable chair in a warm, well-lit space.¹⁰¹ Assistants were advised not to 'crash' into other staff's cubicles or disturb clients during 'treatments'.¹⁰² According to the *Journal*, cubicles inspired clients to unburden themselves on every topic under the sun.¹⁰³

Both barbers and ladies' hairdressers had to have excellent social skills to make their shops successful, but women talked to their hairdressers about personal issues, while men did not.¹⁰⁴ This reflected wider social roles where men's role was to earn money, while women arranged the emotional life of the family.¹⁰⁵ A 1979 American study of 90 hairdressers revealed that listening to clients' problems was an important part of their job. On average, the hairdressers saw 55 customers a week and spent 25 minutes talking to each of them. About a third of that time was spent talking about moderate-to-serious personal problems, particularly related to children, physical health, marriage, depression and anxiety. The topics were similar to those heard by mental health professionals. Hairdressers responded with support, sympathy and light-heartedness, or sometimes they just listened. Long-standing, trusting relationships developed between clients and hairdressers, nurtured by regular contact and the privacy afforded by the salons' layout.¹⁰⁶

Yet women were not all rendered equal by the swish of the cubicle curtain. The role of confidant co-existed with an avoidance of 'familiarity' on the part of the hairdresser. Hairdressers valued their long-term clients and listened to personal problems but they wished to maintain the distance between hairdresser and client. Hairdresser Alva Ingle referred to clients as

acquaintances who she would not see outside of the salon, rather than as friends. Mairi White explained that she had a very nice clientele but noted that the salon was not the place to make friends, while Olwen Rae remembered being asked for a different assistant by one of the customers who felt the assistant was 'too familiar'. Her reflection of the situation was: 'Clients, I think, they like them friendly but they don't like familiarity. You've got to hold your dignity and treat the client with respect.' She only addressed a client by her first name if she knew her outside the salon. The friendliness without familiarity approach may have been recognition that a monetary relationship placed limits between client and hairdresser. It also may have been easier for clients to tell their problems to someone who was not a complete stranger yet at the same time had no involvement in their domestic lives.

Men held the purse-strings in many marriages, and while a husband might take his habitual barber shop visit for granted, convincing him of the necessity of his wife's regular salon visits could be tricky. As one woman lamented, 'Like many other long-suffering wives, I can never make my husband understand that a permanent wave is not, after all, as lasting as its name implies.'¹⁰⁷ Expense was a barrier; for some women, visits to the hairdresser remained an occasional event. In 1946 the *Journal* complained that, although many women visited the salon regularly, many other women still saw the hairdresser as providing a 'temporary glamorising service for special occasions'.¹⁰⁸ Alva Ingle explained that housewives came in only for permanent waves at Isles and Poole and, in between appointments, they would look after their hair at home, rather than coming in for a regular shampoo and set.¹⁰⁹ A woman interviewed by Helen May stated that because her family was short of money, she never went to the hairdresser,¹¹⁰ though most women visited a salon on occasion. Alan Judson noted that 'it didn't matter how poor they were they got their hair done for their weddings'.¹¹¹

A visit to a salon required forethought; appointments were necessary and women had to plan for the time required. A perm might take from two to three hours, a shampoo and set required 30 minutes to one hour and a trim 20 minutes.¹¹² In the late 1950s, straightforward perms were transformed by bouffant styles, and in the 1960s the 'beehive', an up-swept style involving elaborate setting and lots of hairspray, became all the rage.

The number of women working in the paid labour force more than doubled in New Zealand between 1945 and 1971, with much of the increase being the result of the entry of married women into the paid workforce. Married women's workforce participation rose from 17.2% in 1945 to 49.9% in 1971.¹¹³ Working women had their own money to pay for visits to the hairdresser but less time to spend there.

In the post-war era changes in salons reflected design innovations in other working environments, responding to the need for more efficient use of space to serve a greater number of customers. In the 1950s Auckland salons led the way in changing from cubicles to open plan, inspired by reports from Australia.¹¹⁴ Howard Sinclair, who had worked in Australia, had the first open-plan salon in Taranaki. He remembered an Australian consultant as a catalyst of change; the Australian accused New Zealand salons of being closed off, 'like undertakers'. He encouraged salon owners to open out the space and to remove barriers.¹¹⁵

Clients at first resisted the new-look salons because they did not want to relinquish their privacy. Gradually, though, they accepted the new circumstances.¹¹⁶ Older hairdressers often found it difficult to abandon cubicles: 'When I saw the new [open-plan] way I was shocked. I thought fancy sitting there with everybody looking at you.'¹¹⁷ For a time, tinting and dyeing remained confined to a private space because clients 'like to pretend' that they 'did not need it.'¹¹⁸ Thinning hair and baldness also called for seclusion, and one salon maintained a cubicle for fitting wigs.¹¹⁹ Opening up the cubicles also changed the etiquette of the salon tête-à-tête. Howard Sinclair believed that the loss of privacy ended the 'very personal things that people were saying'.¹²⁰ Mairi White reinforced this comment: 'Well I mean everybody hears your conversation don't they? You feel as if you've got to be careful what you talk about, what you say. It was more private when you had the cubicles than it is today.'¹²¹ In contrast Alva Ingle thought that clients could still talk confidentially to her because the clients were not very close together, although she did acknowledge that cubicles had more of a 'personal aspect'.¹²²

Salons responded to a demand from the burgeoning youth population for innovative, less elaborate and sometimes confrontational styles. In the mid-1950s the 'widgie' with the 'duck's ass' cut was at the forefront of rebellious youth fashion. In April 1958 in the pages of *Te Ao Hou*, Kathryn Leef recorded the story of a 'Modern Outcast' who, having got her new haircut for 7/6 at 'Kay's' on Karangahape Road in Auckland, donned her tight black slacks with 'a 4in width leather belt, also a tight fitting topper in a brightly coloured pattern' and 'rock and roll' shoes that 'fitted to perfection'. Her hairdresser proclaimed her 'real cool'.¹²³

The impact of youth fashion was to be felt more dramatically in the 1960s. In 1964 the Beatles visited New Zealand and young people went wild. The 'mop-topped' Fab Four set a trend across the Western world.¹²⁴ In imitation of their rock idols and all they stood for, young men's hairstyles became progressively

longer. The demand for barbers' services had been declining throughout the 1950s, as men shaved at home and bought their cigarettes from an expanding number of outlets. These losses, however, were insignificant compared to the decline in popularity of the 'short back and sides'. Hair remained a marker of men's respectability, but in the 1960s many more men, particularly young men, were willing to risk, if not walking on the wild side, certainly growing their hair on the long side. According to the American advice columnist Ann Landers, in 1968 hair was 'one of the most passionately argued subjects of our time — ranking third after Vietnam and race riots'.¹²⁵ Long hair, with androgynous dress, came to signify a generation rebelling against its elders and their versions of appropriate masculinity and femininity.

Long hair for men became the subject of intense controversy in New Zealand homes, in schools and in the media. The editor of the *Evening Star* provoked a storm of protest in 1972 when he commended the Singaporean government for refusing to admit tourists with long hair.¹²⁶ One of his supporters claimed sailors with short hair were 'splendid examples of young manhood'.¹²⁷ For those who aligned masculinity with strength, independence and aggression, long hair was a marker of effeminacy and suspect countercultural values, a point made clearly in the letter columns of the *Evening Star*. Long-haired men were apparently divided into two categories:

One is the effeminate type who look so devoid of any trace of manhood. Some of these types use eye-shadow and other beauty aids, wear bangles and are generally pitiful looking. The other type are the scruffy, filthy, hippie types. These are usually the out-of-work types, some of whom are kept by their female counterparts and can often be found in the city police courts and can be smelt before seen.¹²⁸

In 1972, New Plymouth Boys' High School banned 120 boys from school until they had haircuts. The editor of the *Evening Star* commended the school's stance and suggested that employers and other schools should adopt this policy. Long hair was 'out of character in a modern world, a pathetic rebellion against reality'.¹²⁹ A magistrate in Invercargill told a defendant with long hair: 'if you have four shillings spend it and we will see what you look like as a human being'.¹³⁰ Meanwhile school boys taped and pinned their hair in order to escape detection when it broke the 'below the collar' rule.

The conformist atmosphere of barber shops had gone stale. Young men were seeking a breath of fresh air in a new style of masculinity which allowed experimentation. Barbers had two alternatives: adapt or leave the industry. Many went out of business. The daily newspapers published alarming statistics. In 1970 the *Evening Star* claimed that over 20 Wellington shops had closed in the past few years and that in 1971 one shop was closing every three

or four weeks in Otago. The latter report suggested that in the past six months 16 shops had closed in Otago, 22 in Christchurch and 64 in Auckland.¹³¹ Both the *Otago Daily Times* and the *Evening Star* labelled men's hairdressing a dying trade.¹³²

The development of a youth culture with an emphasis on stylistic variety and changing fashions was difficult for barbers to accept. By 1971 most barbers were aged between 55 and 64 years.¹³³ The *Review* tried to educate barbers: 'How much trade are you losing when you angrily throw out young men with long hair?'¹³⁴ Barbers' haircuts were said to display a 'hypnotic sameness'.¹³⁵ New Zealand's male hairdressers were condemned as having the lowest standards in the world, with the sole aim of getting customers in and out of the chair as quickly as possible.¹³⁶ A pessimist gloomily predicted that ladies' hairdressers 'will eventually take over the entire cutting trade'.¹³⁷ Barbers had to realize that they could not survive on short haircuts. They had to learn to make money out of long hair and new looks while continuing to cater for 'staid' customers.¹³⁸ 'Once our patrons learn that we can give quality services they will not be seeking services in the beauty shops and elsewhere.'¹³⁹

The Kinks's 1964 hit song 'Dedicated Follower of Fashion' satirized the male follower of fads but in so doing spoke to a new male interest in appearance. In that year the first demonstration of 'men's hair culture work' was held in Wellington. Over 40, mainly younger, hairdressers attended and showed keen interest in the colouring of a model's hair. Another important step was the introduction of classes in men's hairdressing at Auckland Technical Institute in 1964. The *Review* hoped that these classes would solve the problem of the 'Beatle-look' by teaching hairdressers to style hair, not just cut it. The course covered customer psychology, hairstyling, health, salon hygiene, care of equipment and business management.¹⁴⁰ Although highly praised by hairdressers around the country, the classes ended in 1966 because of the lack of a tutor.¹⁴¹ In 1965 the Haute Coiffure Masculin[sic] Group was established in Auckland. The group's demonstration of modern trends in gentlemen's hairstyling was attended by 70 hairdressers.¹⁴² The following year the Auckland Master Ladies' Hairdressers' Association incorporated male styling into its competition.¹⁴³ In 1967 Christchurch held a 'Hair styling and Blow-waving Competition', as did Wellington.¹⁴⁴ That same year, the Dunedin Association held its first demonstration of gents' hairdressing.¹⁴⁵ In the early 1970s the National Benson and Hedges Hairdressing Competitions began and the Otago Polytechnic held a 'special advanced styling class' for hairdressers.¹⁴⁶

Men who did not want to put their long tresses in the hands of a barber could turn to other experts in the business of beauty. Just as men's needs were becoming more complex, women's hairstyles became simplified, due in part to the success of Vidal Sassoon, whose hairstyles were said to have had an impact on the Beatles. Echoing the fashions of the 1920s, Sassoon created the 'Classic Bob' in 1963.¹⁴⁷ The cult of the cut overtook the older regime of permanent waves, rollers, and shampoo and sets. The *Woman's Weekly* approved when Dinah Lee, New Zealand's 'top popster', adopted a Sassoon hairstyle in 1964. Backcombing, teasing and lacquering became a thing of the past as women turned to styles that, as Lee remarked, needed little upkeep: 'I just wash it and it falls into place: It's great.'¹⁴⁸ Her male equivalent, Mr Lee Grant, the biggest music star of 1967, sported a Sassoon-style haircut along with his 'mosaic-mod jacket and fold-over tie look'.¹⁴⁹

Salons could now be designed to accommodate people of either sex. The Sassoon revolution was also one of décor: 'There's going to be no stuffiness, no cathedral atmosphere, no plushlined hush. We're going to have cool, cool jazz playing in the background. Those who don't like it can find a morgue of their choice.'¹⁵⁰ The 'décor of glass, chrome, black terrazzo and stainless steel' in Sassoon's London salon was inviting to both women and men.¹⁵¹ A picture of a man having his hair styled by a woman in a salon graced the cover of the *Otago Daily Times* in July 1972. 'Dunedin men are now being seen in what was once the favourite preserve of women — the hair salon' read the caption.¹⁵² Salons adopted gender-neutral décor and names, dropping plush for plain and 'beauty' for 'hairstyling'.¹⁵³ 'Men prefer a women's hairdresser because they have a reputation for not taking too much off,' one young man said. After painstakingly growing his hair a man wanted it styled, not pruned.¹⁵⁴

The transition to unisex salons was not always smooth. When two men came into her salon, Alva Ingle turned them away because she did not know how to deal with them.¹⁵⁵ The masculinity of the first men who entered salons might be questioned. Howard Sinclair recalled the first time a man got a perm in his salon: 'it was the talk of the place. . . . I can remember this vividly, because we all thought he must work in the fashion industry or something or be an actor or something. But he told us he worked in the meat works. That really surprised us.'¹⁵⁶ Initially the *Review* advocated the need for one or two private rooms for men's hair colouring and perms. The request made of a woman hairdresser to colour a lady client's fiancé's hair led to an anxious letter to the *Journal* in 1965. The female client was reassured that there were no problems in treating a male head of hair, but to avoid embarrassment on the part of the male client and the other female clients, privacy should be arranged.¹⁵⁷ Some ladies' salons opened at nights to cater for men separately

from women. Barbers complained that this practice was unlawful, but the legalities of the issue remained obscure and the practice continued.¹⁵⁸

Women hairdressers seemingly won out in the competitive hairdressing industry, signalled by their rising numbers and the 1967 Apprenticeship order which finally recognized the degree of skill required in the trade. In 1971 over 4300 women described their occupation as hairdressing, 448 men were ladies' hairdressers and 1500 men were barbers.¹⁵⁹ A much higher proportion of women hairdressers were business women than in the female workforce as a whole throughout the period. The number of women hairdressers who were self-employed or who employed others hovered between 25% and 30% of total women in the trade from 1926 to 1971.¹⁶⁰ Yet men who were ladies' hairdressers tended to share the top positions in the occupation with women, despite being in the minority. In April 1995, no woman was named in *Metro's* list of the top ten hairdressers in Auckland.¹⁶¹ While once men would have hesitated at the salon door, by the end of the twentieth century they laid claim to its greatest expertise.

In 1972 hair was literally in the spotlight. A social transformation was marked on the New Zealand stage by the rock musical *Hair*, whose title song exhorted the young to 'grow it, show it'. The musical represented a highpoint of the hippie counter culture, challenging sexual and social conventions with controversial nude scenes. A huge success on Broadway and the West End, it showed more than the censor wanted New Zealanders to see and was put on trial for obscenity.¹⁶² According to *Hair*, changes in style presaged a social revolution, away from war-mongering, consumerism, sexism and racism. Style, in fact, did not hold such power; the revolution never occurred and as youthful student rebels aged, many cut their hair and headed off into 'real jobs'.

Yet the sartorial shifts and the changes in the way the business of hairdressing was conducted were still consequential. Beauty work changed significantly: women moved into hairdressing as a career and displaced male barbers to a large extent, although those at the top of the profession were likely to be men. Those barber shops which remained were still likely to be male preserves, but they were few in number and much less likely to profit from sidelines in gambling, contraceptives, pornography and smokers' requisites. Men, once trapped in a single style, could choose to adopt the playfulness of the hitherto 'feminine' fashion world. No longer diametric opposites, the differences in masculinity and femininity were inscribed in more subtle ways. Women and men have their hair coloured, dreaded, extended, shaved or merely cut, but when they do so, they are likely to have it done in slightly different ways and it means different things.

The dramatic changes in style — short hair for women in the 1920s and long hair for men in the 1960s and 1970s — seemed to presage a social revolution, but in the end both led women and men into a greater engagement with commercial beauty culture. Whether that culture — which in 2017 includes upmarket barber shops for men which appeal to nostalgia — enhances lives through experimentation and play, or diminishes them through consumption and slavish following of fashion, hair is likely to remain a central signifier of gender. We have only to think of the endless comments on former Prime Minister Helen Clark’s hair and the complete absence of remarks on John Key’s short back and sides. Perceived to be at the heart of the issue of Helen Clark’s femininity, her hair could make her ‘butch’ or ‘feminine’, and only the latter was likely to bring approval.

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NOTES

Our thanks to the editors for their very helpful comments. This work has its origins in Catherine Smith's PhD thesis, 'The Business of Beauty: A History of Hairdressers 1920s–1960s', PhD thesis, University of Otago, 1998.

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- 158 NZHRTR, April 1973, p.5. The Auckland Association, for example, saw ladies' hairdressers who began to cut men's hair as a direct invasion of their territory. They unsuccessfully tried to stop the practice whereby salons opened two late nights a week.
- 159 *New Zealand Census of Population and Dwellings*, 1971, cited in Smith, 'The Business of Beauty,' p.86.

160 For the occupational analysis of women's employment as hairdressers, see Smith, 'The Business of Beauty,' ch.6, pp.159–96.

161 Jeremy Hensen, 'Over the Top', *Metro*, April 1995, pp.88–93.

162 The prosecution was unsuccessful. Chris Watson and Roy Shuker, *In the Public Good? Censorship in New Zealand*, Dunmore Press, Palmerston North, 1998, p.115.