

Young Japanese men's trend: Trying to look pretty

Grooming boom points to rise in narcissism, with profits to be had

Kyodo

Young Japanese men are starting to resemble their female counterparts when it comes to the pursuit of beauty, with the nation awash in salons dedicated to male grooming and products such as hair removal creams, electric nose-hair trimmers and face-firming masks targeting the image-conscious man.

Men in their 20s and 30s today were teenagers when the now-common expression "ikemen" — meaning a good-looking man — was a new buzzword. The advent of the term and a social phenomenon lionizing ikemen have given males



Competition between the sexes: The sales area for male beauty products at retailer Tokyu Hands in Tokyo's Shibuya district is seen in this photo taken on June 11. KYODO

of this particular age group a belief that looking pretty is pretty cool. At the same time, gaining a more attractive look is a way to compensate for a lack of self-confidence.

A 34-year-old patissier in Osaka is one such man.

He is a regular at a men's beauty salon there and spends just under ¥5,000 each month for a haircut, shampoo, shave and facial.

"If I look unkempt, it would be embarrassing for my friends when they hang out with me. I also want to make a good impression on my customers," he said.

To that end, he recently added a new treatment — nail care — so the

cakes he bakes look pristine when he hands them over the counter. "I used to think it was embarrassing for men to undergo beauty treatments. But after I started having them, I've become more confident about being seen" by other people, he said.

According to a survey conducted last year on 500 men aged between 25 and 49 in the Tokyo metropolitan area by Beauty World Soken, a research institute run by Recruit Co., 37 percent of those between 25 and 29 said they were "interested" in beauty care and services. This was more than twice the 17 percent of those between 45 and 49 and considerably larger than the 28 percent between 30 and 34 who gave the same answer.

"I often check my reflection in a train window," admitted 18 percent of the men in the youngest group, compared with an overall average of 8 percent.

Akira Nojima, who heads the beauty research institute, came up with a new word for these young men — "kireo." It is coined from "kirei," meaning pretty, and "o," a suffix of sorts often used in the names of Japanese men.

In addition to having been "baptized" by the ikemen phenomenon as schoolboys, the kireo cohorts are having their sense of beauty-consciousness reinforced by the growing presence of women in the workplace, Nojima said. These men "have a lower threshold of resistance to enjoying beauty care," he said. In that sense, they are just like women in the way they like beauty treatments, he added.

A 28-year-old company employee who lives in Tokyo said he carries a beauty pouch around with him. The small bag, which contains a lip cream, tweezers, hand mirror and some other items, is always inside a bag he takes to the office. "If you look good, it makes a good impression on the people you meet. It's part of my job to pay attention to my appearance," he said.

A recent government survey also underscores the growing enthusiasm of young Japanese men for pampering themselves. In 2011, single men aged 34 or younger spent an average ¥11,000 on beauty products, up 33 percent from the



A 34-year-old patissier has his nails done at a men's beauty salon in Osaka on March 29. KYODO

the company launched a new model for men in April this year. Sales are 1.5 times higher than the consumer electronics giant expected.

In a sign of the times, the sales area for male beauty products at retailer Tokyu Hands' store in Tokyo's Shibuya district is 50 percent larger than it was last September.

Not everybody is happy with this trend. A male executive in his 50s said men should "make more effort to clean up what's on the inside." Meanwhile, a company employee in her 20s said, "I feel depressed when I see a man who has skin that's prettier than mine."

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year before, according to Internal Affairs and Communications Ministry statistics.

Naturally, companies are trying to cash in on the trend.

Panasonic Corp. initially launched a scalp-cleansing machine in 2011 targeting women. But after finding out that 30 percent of the purchasers were actually men,