

The Trend of Creating Atypical Male Images in Heterosexist Korean Society

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the way in which Korean newspapers, situated in a society characterized by consumerism as well as heterosexist patriarchy, encourages the creation of images of “new men.” As a medium that wields public authority, newspapers report on new male images, highlighting the fact that men’s bodies are also being incorporated into physical capitalization. As grooming is increasingly common among heterosexual men, men’s grooming is being portrayed as natural and as a form of behavior that conforms to “human instinct” rather than as a deviant behavior among homosexual men. However, new male discourses incessantly emphasize masculine vitality, suggesting that it has no intent to disturb the heterosexist social order, nor to abandon the structural privileges that men and heterosexuals have collectively held.

Keywords: new men, masculinity, consumerism, heterosexual

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Introduction

This paper analyzes social attitudes toward atypical masculinity in heterosexual consumer society in Korea. In the Korean media after the year 2000, new forms of masculinity, including *kkot minam* ("flower-like handsome men" or pin-up boys), metrosexuals, ubersexuals, and cross-sexuals debuted in turn, and news stories explaining and defining these novel forms of masculinity were frequently aired. The phenomenon of men who deviate from traditional Korean concepts of masculinity became fascinating fodder for the daily news, which was constantly looking for new stories to report.

Korean industries are profiting economically from these new male image trends. In contrast to Western societies, where changing social views of men's grooming were usually influenced initially by gay culture before being influenced by commercial consumerism, the trend in new male images seems to be actively pushed by consumer industries in Korea. The currently emerging new male images in a strongly heterosexual society appear to be packaged with devices designed to dilute those images. The effects and risks of these atypical masculine images seem to have been carefully calculated in order to guard against transgressions of societal norms.

This paper analyzes the ways in which the Korean press, situated within both a consumer society and a heterosexual patriarchal society, creates this trend, by introducing new male images to the public and encouraging the creation of "new men." Though the press is undeniably situated within a patriarchal society that adheres to standardized concepts of masculinity and homophobia, it is simultaneously located within a consumer society that publicizes atypical notions of masculinity in order to win over new male consumers. Therefore, it is highly probable that the press may focus on interesting news stories concerning images that deviate from traditional masculinity, while at the same time distancing itself from such changes and maintaining a critical tone towards them.

My research objectives are as follows. First, I examine the ways in which the press as a public entity introduces images of new men

as a new social category. However, what is really "new" about it? How are images of new men distinguished from the existing mode of masculinity? Second, by looking at various articles that introduce new men in a positive way, I have assessed the ways the press has weakened the social stigma attached to atypical masculinity, especially in terms of grooming and homosexuality. In this media discourse, how are atypical male images and behaviors that include grooming and homosexuality reinterpreted when they are introduced to the mainstream culture? If trends are social processes that change the meaning and importance of products and behaviors (Chaney 1996), is the new men trend now deconstructing and redefining traditionally assumed notions of "feminine" and "homosexual?" Based on this analysis, I discuss the dual strategy for circulating and consuming atypical male images in heterosexual consumer society. Finally, by focusing on the critical discourse on this trend, I analyze whether there is social fear of the invasion of homosexual culture and feminization of men, and discuss its political implications.

Social Contexts of the Appearance of Atypical Male Images

Gay Culture and Consumer Culture in Western Societies

1) Actively Produced and Diffused Gay Culture

The definition of a masculine image, along with its nature and characteristics, is made within a specific social and cultural context, and thus inexorably changes over time. In patriarchal societies, the regulation of masculinity and femininity is a strategy by which difference and discrimination can be created on the basis of sexual distinctions (Connell 1993). The stereotype that "real men don't act like girls" is a principal component of the classical construction of masculinity. Insofar as masculinity is created on the basis of the fear of looking like a girl or not looking like a man, homophobia is the core principle that defines masculinity (Kimmel 1994; Chris 2004). Because grooming oneself to look beautiful or grooming-related consumer activity

have both been regarded as extremely feminine behaviors, men who care about grooming have traditionally been branded as dandies or playboys, or even as gays. In the traditional masculine paradigm, real men are supposed to be indifferent to fashion, to the point that they may lack the sense even to choose matching clothes; thus, such sartorial neglect is not viewed as shameful (Bordo 1999).¹

However, the stereotype that relegates grooming strictly to the province of feminine behavior has gradually changed; recently, men who groom themselves are increasingly being viewed simply as men possessed of an appreciation of aesthetics. This change, which was previously regarded as a “feminization of masculinity,” is believed to have been precipitated by the influence exerted by the gay subculture on mainstream heterosexual culture in the West. Ever since the Stonewall incident that was a starting point for the gay liberation movement, homosexuals in New York, New Orleans, or San Francisco have formed a subculture. Moreover, gay culture born out of gay sensibility was actively consumed both consciously and unconsciously. For examples, Broadway musicals, where the harmony of music and fashion is stronger than any other genre, overflow with gay sensibilities (Jun 2002). A plethora of musicals such as *Cabaret*, *Chorus Line*, *Rent*, *Kiss Me Kate*, and *Gypsy* that seem otherwise unrelated to homosexuality have been produced by gays or gay icons and have utilized gay codes, to the surreptitious pleasure of gay audiences.

The fashion industry has also influenced the production and spread of atypical male images. According to Bordo, the enthusiasm for male beauty and sex appeal began not with female consumers but

1. Historically, grooming was not always attributed solely to women. As Hollander explains, from the 14th to the 17th centuries, men of the aristocratic class in the West styled themselves using wigs and cosmetics and wore clothing made from silk and lace, which are now regarded as feminine fabrics. However, grooming at that time symbolized class privilege for certain men, rather than a distinguishing marker between men and women. The notion that self-adornment is a strictly feminine behavior began after industrialization, when masculinity and femininity were clearly divided, in keeping with the separation of public and private and the division of labor by sex (Bordo 1999, 201-202).

with gay male designers. When the gay liberation movement began to spread, male designers and fashion leaders began to experiment with the disruption of traditionally dichotomized sexual symbols through products that blurred sexual distinctions or presented men in non-masculine ways or that smacked of bisexuality. The so-called feminization of men's fashion has progressed by a repudiation of the stiff, heavy fabrics, dark colors, and strong exterior used to symbolize male power and status in post-industrial society (Kim and Lee 2002). As seen in the Calvin Klein underwear ads that came out in 1992, instead of the traditional images of men standing proudly and looking directly into the camera, the images of men looking meek and passive, leaning to the side or with their gazes lowered began to proliferate.

Mass media has also been another stage for atypical male images. Since the mid-1960s, a third image that could not be defined clearly as either masculine or feminine and was characterized by a homosexual “vibe” and sensibility, became trendy in British popular culture (Savage 1990, 160). In the 1980s, gay style and images began to proliferate in the mass media under the aegis of well-known celebrities. After the 1990s, not only did gay images proliferate in the movies and television, but the gay lifestyle also came to be depicted as positive and natural. Tom Hanks, the male lead who turned in a passionate performance as a gay lawyer in the 1993 movie, *Philadelphia*, even won an Academy Award. Recently, the most obvious marker of homosexual influence on heterosexuals is the American cable television program, “Queer Eye for the Straight Guy,” which premiered in 2003. This program, which airs in a prime time slot and has received high ratings, features five gay men who conduct make-overs on heterosexual men who are awkward at interpersonal relationships and lack fashion sense. This suggests that so-called gay style is being accepted among heterosexual men and may even be becoming desirable, and also that the symbols of masculinity and masculine looks which have been traditionally attributed to men are changing under the influence of gay culture while assuming more flexibility in an alternative direction (Chris 2004, 18).

However, one cannot easily say that gay identity has been fully

accepted in the real world just because representations of gay images have increased in the media. Although homosexual groups have been given more opportunity to speak out about their rights and desires, their civil rights have not been completely guaranteed. For example, even in the United States, gay marriage and adoption are still illegal in many states (Kim H. 2000). Furthermore, the fear of AIDS, which was mistakenly attributed to homosexuality in the early 1980s, revived social rejection of homosexuality. After official censorship of musicals in the state of New York was abolished in 1968, homosexuality has been depicted more directly and intensively over time. But even in the late 1990s, it was not depicted in a positive light. Moreover, dual marketing strategies were used to ensure a heterosexual audience (Jun 2002).

2) A Surfacing Gay Market and Dual Marketing Strategy

Gay style, which was traditionally taboo for heterosexuals, has become socially accepted, and heterosexuals have been influenced by gay culture through programs such as "Queer Eye." With this change in social climate, the *New York Times* coined the term "metrosexual" in 2003 to refer to heterosexual men who appropriated gay style and pursued alternative forms of masculinity. This terminology had actually first appeared ten years earlier in England, but it came into popular usage only after the social atmosphere changed. Previously, other terms such as "stray (straight/gay)" and "hetero-gay" were coined to refer to a new type of man who was not homosexual but appeared gay in various ways. These changes suggest that attitudes toward men who groom themselves or make themselves more attractive have been changing rapidly. The fact that men are starting to open up to gay culture rather than distance themselves from it would make it seem that they are overcoming their homophobia (Chris 2004, 20-21).

However, this change may be criticized as a commercialization of gay images. Increased interest in male grooming can be interpreted not as the homosexual culture eroding the heterosexual one, but as a consumer society appropriating gay images in order to create and

exploit new markets. According to Alexander (2003), as part of the changes to postmodern society, which regards consumption more highly than production, ideal masculinity is being redefined as a product created by consumer activity rather than as the result of male reputation, riches, or social position (Alexander 2003, 552). He interprets the diffusion of new male images in consumer society as a component of the transformation of the modern man into a postmodern consumer. As consumer industries are creating and endorsing a new form of masculinity in order to sell products, masculinity can be understood as something that is created via the consumption of proper brands.

Companies are paying fresh attention to homosexuals, as they are considered a rapidly growing demographic with high education and income levels who spend most of their income on themselves. Homosexuals, who are estimated at 5-6% of the entire population, make up 19% of total consumption in the United States. Therefore, big companies such as Levis, Miller, and AT&T began to sponsor gay events and produce advertisements appealing to gay images and sensibility. However, despite the marketability of gay images, heterosexuals still held a negative view of different sexual orientations, and were concerned about marketing strategies that targeted this demographic. When Walt Disney announced a homosexual-friendly employment policy in 1977, it became the target of a major protest by 15 hundred million people from religious communities. Therefore, various advertising strategies have been created to try to avoid provoking them. Phrases or images with double meanings that can be easily recognized by homosexuals but not by other people are often used in advertisements (Kim H. 2000).

The existence of homosexuality is no longer denied. Instead, a fabricated public homosexuality has been formed in order to ease the double marketing strategy: selling products that can emotionally appeal to homosexuals while at the same time satisfying heterosexuals (Schulman 1998; re-cited from Jun 2002, 176). Gay images that can feasibly be sold in heterosexual society must be able to win the dominant culture over without appearing too provocative. According-

ly, in ads that featured male models with an air of homosexuality, the suggestion of homosexuality was tempered by the deployment signs that would seem to confirm the models' heterosexuality (Hawks 1996; Mosse 1996). The new male image created via the efforts of consumer industries is less interested in revising or discarding the masculinity of heterosexist society than it is simply in marketing the novelty inherent to the gay style or image.

Gay Culture and Consumer Culture in Korea—Invisibility and the Social Exclusion of Gay Culture

In Korea, the social movement of sexual minority groups has a short history. Homosexuality rose to the surface of Korean society during the mid-1990s, when gays and lesbians began to unite around college campuses. After Chodonghoe, the first gay and lesbian rights organization to form in Korea in 1993, was disbanded, such gay and lesbian organizations as Chingu Sai and Kkiri Kkiri were founded (Jun and Chung 2006). One reason that the gay rights movement became more active at this time was because interest in human rights grew rapidly after democratization, and another reason was because the feminist movement ushered in discourse about sexual politics more prominently. Later, gays and lesbians launched a queer culture festival and a campaign to promote the proper recognition of homosexuality in Korean society—this campaign was led by the “Korean Council for the Homosexual Rights Movement.”

However, despite this activism on the part of gays and lesbians, the public perception of homosexuality in Korean society did not change remarkably. In 2000, the first and largest gay website in Korea, “exzone.com” was classified as a “corrupt” site in violation of the Child Protection Act by the Korea Internet Safety Commission, who claimed that the site promoted homosexuality to children. Gay and lesbian rights organizations protested the inclusion of homosexuality as part of the criteria for sites that were considered “harmful to children,” along with “prostitution and acts of sexual perversion such as bestiality, incest, and sadomasochism,” and launched a campaign

and a lawsuit against the government. In addition, same-sex sexual preference is identified as a “mental disorder” in Appendix 1 of the Judicial Regulations for Military Personnel (Lee 2007).

The media representation of homosexuals in Korea is also very negative. Until the late 1990s, homosexuality was defined as an acquired mental illness, connected to social misconduct and delinquency. This media discourse sent the message that homosexuals should never be accepted in society (Beak and Kim 1998).² Movies with a homosexual theme such as *Buenos Aires*, which won the director's award in Festival de Cannes, were banned from screening by the Performance Ethics Board. Some conservative Christian groups like the Christian Council of Korea argue that the media representation of minority identity promotes homosexuality, and thus should be strictly banned. As it has been widely recognized that homosexuals, women, foreign immigrant workers, disabled people, or the socially underprivileged have been discriminated against has prevailed, the right to be protected from “discrimination based upon different sexual orientation” was added to the anti-discrimination law made by the National Human Rights Commission in 2004 (Seo 2005, 69). However, according to Seo Dong-jin's argument, protective legal instruments based on a universal concept of rights are usually limited to the right of pursuing happiness and safety only within the realm of private life, not in public sectors such as employment, health care service, education, adoption, living, and property rights. Therefore, homosexuals in Korea need to disguise themselves as heterosexuals to enjoy their civil rights. These policies of tolerance that take hetero-

2. A television program produced by SBS dealt with the issue of homosexuals in August 1992 in “Gay—The Two Faces of Sex” and in 1995 “The 3rd Sex.” These programs claimed that since homosexuality is an acquired mental illness caused by a particular environmental factor it is possible to overcome it with individual effort and will. Another implicit message was that “since homosexuals have chosen to become so, society does not need to protect their human rights.” In 1997, other SBS programs such as “Bathroom Traps” have suggested that homosexual intercourse spreads AIDS and that they are a danger group (Baek and Kim 1998, 84-86).

sexuality for granted are similar to the policies of assimilation. Under the multicultural postmodern discourses that encourage acceptance of difference, minorities are reduced to a type of multicultural identity and the criticism of heterosexual power becomes ineffective (Seo 2003, 42- 49).

Discriminatory and prejudicial attitudes toward homosexuality remain strong among the general public. Among the diverse social minorities in Korea, homosexuals are perceived the most negatively. According to a 2002 nationwide survey of university students' attitudes towards four minority groups—North Korean defectors, the handicapped, migrant workers, and homosexuals—gays and lesbians constituted the highest percentage in terms of negative stereotypes or a sense of social distance (Kim S. 2004). In particular, although more people selected the term “abnormal” than “immoral” to describe homosexuals, given the dichotomous attitude of normality vs. abnormality, this shows that discrimination against gays and lesbians is regarded as unavoidable, owing to the abnormality inherent to homosexuality. Another study conducted by Park and Chung (2006) also showed that, more than any other type of social minority, homosexuals are considered to be “people who have problems fitting in with other people.” Regardless of the respondents' academic background, sense of values, or family income, homosexuals were generally regarded as the most marginalized group.

In Korea, gay culture is faced with many obstacles that hinder its penetration into mainstream culture. Korean television shows or movies that deal with homosexuality in a realistic and serious manner remain exceedingly rare. Almost every actor who came out as gay would quickly disappear from the airwaves. Thus, the appearance of atypical male images in Korea may occur differently from what was observed in Western culture. In the United States and England, the “new male image” gradually surfaced in a stepped process by which gay culture first became accepted, followed by consumer culture beginning to market the images. However, in Korea, consumer culture actively markets the attendant images while continuing to suppress or ignore gay culture.

Atypical Men in Korean Consumer Culture

Looking at various studies and data from the 1990s, it would be difficult to assert that Korean men habitually adorned themselves or appeared obsessed with grooming. According to a survey conducted by Amore Pacific, a leading Korean cosmetics company, in 1997, no more than 20% of men purchased their own toiletries. The fact that sales of men's toiletries are sensitive to business fluctuations also indicates that men did not regard toiletries as necessities. After the men's toiletries market accounted for 120 billion won in 1992, the numbers climbed continuously by 10-20% annually until 1996, and then fell precipitously after the IMF crisis, with a recorded growth rate of -28.6%. Ad spending decreased by approximately 37%, from 7.7 billion won in 1997 to 4.4 billion in 1998 (Shin 1999).

However, going into the twenty-first century, interest and investment in men's appearance began to rise gradually. According to a fact-finding report on men's cosmetics conducted by one cosmetics company in 2006, the ratio of men who purchased their own beauty products rose to 30%. The scale of the men's cosmetics market has been growing, from 270 billion won in 2002, to 300 billion won in 2003, 330 billion won in 2004, and 490 billion won in 2007. However, despite this trend towards growth, men's cosmetics purchases in 2007 accounted for only 9% of the total cosmetics market (5.5 trillion won). This means that the men's cosmetics market still has a very high potential for growth. Accordingly, cosmetic industries are rolling out aggressive marketing strategies to attract men as new consumers.

In order to do so, the Korean cosmetics industry is attempting to alter the current social atmosphere, which views male grooming as taboo or socially transgressive. From product advertisements that declare, “Skincare is no longer for women only,” and “Now, men need makeup, too!” the number of statements designed to spur interest in Korean men's external grooming behaviors are increasing significantly. If the negative view of men's grooming can be altered—that is, if it can be successfully argued that men must also continuously improve their appearance and that grooming behavior is also

natural for men—then the male-oriented cosmetics industries stand to reap great profits.

Nevertheless, the social attitude toward atypical male images and behaviors in Korea has not yet changed completely. Stereotypical notions about men's beautification are being deconstructed and the adornment of one's body is no longer regarded as a feminine behavior, but images that deviate excessively from socially approved masculinity and methods of body care that produce those images are not quite welcomed. The borders are still defined by old notions of masculinity. While Korean men are also wary of the disadvantages of looking unattractive, their fear is restricted to the less serious zone of heterosexual relationships, because men still strongly believe that in the realm of institutionalized marriage and public life, the primary condition for male success is not appearance but ability (Lim 2005). In the same context, powerful and financially capable male images are still dominant in Korean ads for traditionally male items such as cars and banks, while atypical male images tend to be more prevalent in ads for cosmetics, coffee, snacks, ice cream, and beverages (Yang and Yang 2006, 331-332).

Data Collection and Research Method

This paper analyzes the ways in which atypical male images in a patriarchal consumer society are presented to the public and encouraged by the press, with a focus on newspaper articles addressing the "new man." Rather than simply presenting objectively existing "facts," the press selects special issues and expresses them in specific ways (Fowler 1991; Kim Y. 2003). As this method of framing media issues is an interpretive task that imbues reality with meaning, readers' interpretations and popular opinions of specific issues are influenced by the manner in which the press creates and repeatedly transmits news (Jensen and Jankowsky 1991; Lee and Kim 2001).

The medium of the press, a system designed for the circulation of information, is the principal avenue for the reporting of and pro-

mulgation of new trends. Information regarding new values or consumer preferences and attitudes that are said to be on the rise can be spread much more quickly and on a wider scale by the press than by word of mouth or direct observation. The press is the principal force behind public awareness of the emergence of new social types, such as hippies and yuppies, and of their clothing, speaking style, and consumer habits as new trends. In addition, the press is primarily responsible for the publicization of these lifestyles as revolutionary or alternative. The way in which the appearances of these new social types are described as indicators of social change serves to show the press's ability to seize upon social developments (Best 2006, 119). In the Korean press, which has gradually increased the space devoted to lifestyle issues in an effort to enhance their popularity, articles regarding the fashion and grooming of "new men" have been evidencing a detectable increase. In particular, because the press is a medium that is guaranteed a wide readership, as compared to men's style magazines that are limited to a young male readership, industries focused on male consumers can utilize the press as an effective mass marketing tool.

The research material for this paper was obtained through the Korean Integrated News Database System (KINDS), a compilation of all news articles published after 1990. For the sake of convenience, the variety of newspapers referenced was limited to general daily newspapers published in Seoul, such as the *Kyunghyang Daily News*, *Kukmin Daily*, *Dong-A Ilbo*, *Munhwa Ilbo*, *Seoul Shinmun*, *Segye Times*, *Chosun Ilbo*, *Hankyoreh*, and *Hankook Ilbo*, and only information published between January 1, 1990 and August 8, 2007 was used as research material. Using the KINDS search engine, I collected a total of 1,951 sample articles that included the words "new male image," *kkot minam*, "metrosexual," ubersexual," or "cross-sexual" in either the title or main text of the article.

Content Analysis

The Making of New Men in Korean Consumer Society

1) Purchasable New Male Images

In the following section, I analyze the trend and commercialization of the “new man” while examining the constituent factors in the new male image presented in the press, i.e. the symbols that distinguish “new men.” As Table 1 shows, articles addressing the concept of *kkot minam* were most numerous at 1,657, followed by 227 articles on metrosexuals. News articles regarding ubersexuals and cross-sexuals were numbered at 38 and 29, respectively. Reviewing the news articles I analyzed for this paper, the term *kkot minam* initially appeared in 1999; metrosexual, in 2003; ubersexual, in 2005; and cross-sexual, in 2006. *Kkot minam* began to appear more frequently in the news, beginning in 2002, and metrosexual came to the fore in 2004, and continues to receive some press attention. Articles on ubersexuals and cross-sexuals were regularly published in 2006, but with less frequency than the terms *kkot minam* or metrosexual.

After 2001 was declared the “height of the *kkot minam* era,” headlines began to announce the appearance of new male images, including “2003 is the year of the metrosexual,” “Cross-sexuals walk the streets in 2006,” and so on. News articles heralding the new male image included definitions of these new types of images, as well as the products that had to be purchased in order to reproduce them.

Table 1. The Frequency of News Reports on “New Men” by Time Period

	<i>Kkot minam</i>	Metrosexual	Ubersexual	Cross-sexual
1999	4			
2000-2004	713	109		
2005-current	940	118	38	29
Total	1,657	227	38	29

Along with the assertion, “You must have fine skin to be a true *kkot minam*, and you must be beautiful to be a man,” the associated articles introduced skin whitening products, cleansers, eye creams, and such sold by a variety of famous cosmetics companies, while turning men’s attention to skin care (*Kukmin Daily*, June 18, 2002; *Hankook Ilbo*, December 9, 2004). One article, which defined a *kkot minam* as “a man who is more beautiful than a flower and has a pronounced sense of aesthetics,” reported that products such as necklaces, earrings, bracelets, cosmetics, and handbags were flying off the shelves as a result of men attempting to become *kkot minam* (*Segye Times*, August 12, 2002).

Article titles including, “One Accessory Can Make You a *Kkot Minam*,” “Fashion Leaders of 2005,” “Metrosexuals Go for Earrings,” and “Long Layered Hair: Textbook Style for Cross-sexuals in 2006,” appeared in order to showcase special products or styles as symbols of the “new man.” However the products that are required to become a new man do not just stop at one purchase, but are rather continuously added to, becoming packages of products. For example, the items necessary to project a metrosexual image are not limited to a floral shirt and a scarf wrapped around one’s neck, but rather include sexy v-neck sweaters that show off one’s chest, colorful sneakers in fancy designs, earrings or necklaces made from silver or leather, and even mesh or lace underwear. With regard to skin care, masks, moisturizers, exfoliators, and anti-aging, anti-wrinkle, and whitening products are all marketed; and not only are cosmetics, including foundation, powder, and concealers listed, but professional dermatological services, surgical wrinkle removal, blepharoplasty, rhinoplasty, and laser hair removal are included.

Seen from these articles, the new male image is both an image and an identity to be purchased. The image and style of new men can be understood by readers as something realizable simply by virtue of purchasing the specific products presented by the media. Consumers who join the ranks of the “new man” can apprehend the specific meanings attached to each product, and can thus share in that meaning. In the following article, a man who wears a floral shirt

is regarded as someone who is stylish and beautiful, wearing innovative fashions, and who is well off and able to seek out and enjoy stylish, exotic places. Also, in accordance with the definition of the floral shirt as a symbol of the new man, those who follow these fashion trends are considered to be “hip” and “ahead of their time,” whereas those who do not are considered to be old-fashioned enough to refuse and resist change.

The man dressed in flowers—this spring, the cool guy is wearing floral patterns. This spring, men are outshining the flowers. Floral fashions highlight the gentle smiles and firm muscles of metrosexuals. In the past, florals were an “absolute no-no” for men’s clothing, but they are being welcomed this spring, from big, oversized flowers to delicate buds. . . . That’s because the floral patterns that spell out metrosexuality also convey their love for nature and leisure and their desire to leave at a moment’s notice for far-off exotic lands (*Kyunghyang Daily News*, February 17, 2004).

In the passage above, floral shirts no longer constitute visual clues representative of women or homosexuals. As floral shirts have been established as a code for the new man, the linkage of a specific sexual orientation to floral shirts is rendered meaningless. Floral clothing, at least, is no longer a code that enables one to distinguish between men and women or between straight men and gay men.³ Nevertheless, alterations in the symbolic meaning and value previously attributed to this style do not necessarily have to be confusing for readers. As the press, which wields a great deal of popular influence, commands the authority to redefine this style as a code for the new male,

3. As Davis (1992) has asserted, clothing no longer functions as the most effective tool for the publicization of an individual’s social position to the world. The “meaning” emphasized by a specific style of clothing appears to be both ambiguous and fleeting, based on the sense of identity of the person wearing the clothing, the situation, location, and people involved, and even by the instantaneous mood of the person wearing the clothing or of the observers. Under these circumstances, it is difficult to assert that a specific style may function as a component of a cognitive map that defines socially acceptable boundaries (Finkelstein 1991).

it can reduce the ambiguity inherent to the interpretation of the symbolic meaning of this style.

2) The Ways of Redefining Male Grooming

In the articles addressing the new male, grooming is an indicator used to distinguish between the new male image and the traditional male image. To put a finer point on it, interest and investment in the “consumption” of grooming products and services is increasingly presented as a condition for the new type of males, as seen in news articles such as, “A sculpted appearance is a prerequisite for metrosexuals. Just by acknowledging your inner femininity and wanting to groom yourself, you too can be as metrosexual as you want to be” (*Dong-A Ilbo*, August 22, 2003), and “Real men groom” (*Dong-A Ilbo*, June 16, 2007). Such articles emphasize and justify the images of men who groom. Regardless of the terms used to describe the new male, the new male image is characterized by an interest in grooming and adorning one’s external appearance.

News articles actively publicize men who groom as a new male type by redefining the social meaning of men’s grooming, using the following three strategies.

The first is to temper the fear of the social stigma attached to men’s grooming, evidenced in such headlines as “The fashion stylings of confident men” (*Kyunghyang Daily News*, April 8, 2005), “Made-up men are beautiful” (*Kyunghyang Daily News*, May 29, 2003; *Kukmin Daily*, April 18, 2000), and “There’s nothing wrong with men having makeovers” (*Hankook Ilbo*, December 9, 2004), and instead instill fears in men who do not groom that they might be falling behind, as seen in the following articles: “In the metrosexual era, success is shrinking for men with no interest in fashion” (*Dong-A Ilbo*, September 2, 2005); and “*Kkot minam* products enter the limelight as the number of men concerned about their appearance due to corporate restructuring and the worst job shortage in history rises” (*Hankook Ilbo*, December 19, 2001). Thus, men, who have already internalized the idea that a real man must succeed in a fiercely competitive society, are encouraged to recognize their appearance as a

new form of capital to get ahead, as testified by the following articles: “Groom and you shall succeed!” (*Kyunghyang Daily News*, April 8, 2005); and “Men must compete over looks, too” (*Munhwa Ilbo*, May 21, 2007). These articles may be persuasive to individuals currently facing high employment insecurity.

Secondly, the strategy of class distinction is adopted to spread a new image of male grooming. The types of men usually pictured as examples of this new trend are wealthy, extravagant professionals. In articles announcing that “new men” are being spotlighted, the world soccer star, David Beckham, is invariably presented as the model of metrosexuality—a man who wears diamond earrings, changes his hairstyle with each game, and polishes his nails. But even when it is not a major celebrity, the ones who are presented in the mass media as metrosexuals are usually professionals with strong financial means. For example, on one Korean cable channel, the daily lives of a president of a public relations agency, a doctor, and a famous pianist were presented as metrosexual lifestyles. On another channel, information on beauty, fashion, cooking, cars, wine, and shopping was provided, along with specific tips on how to live like a metrosexual (*Kyunghyang Daily News*, October 16, 2004).

This type of media discourse triggers people’s desire for class distinction by emphasizing that a person can purchase a different quality of products for his body according to social status, with the symbolic value of the body differing accordingly. It is emphasized that the metrosexual belongs to the leisure class with a sophisticated sense, who can afford to frequent high-end beauty salons and fitness centers. This highlighting of class differences among men results in weakening the connection between bodily grooming and feminine or homosexual images. When only middle- and upper-class men, who are free from the problem of daily survival, can invest their time and capital in body care, bodily grooming is being depicted as a class symbol rather than a feminine one. The leading ads of high-end brands like Christian Dior, Prada, Gucci, and Yves St. Laurent gradually replaced masculine models with androgynous or feminized images. The feminized masculine beauty trend, which has been inter-

preted as “neo-dandyism,” began primarily with the wealthy upper class (Kim and Kim 2005) and spread throughout all of society (Featherstone 1991, 101). In the same context, the new male image is a class symbol that denotes the capacity for consumption in Korea.

Thirdly, in articles regarding the new male image, men’s grooming is no longer the reserve of homosexuals, who are social minorities, but is rather being redefined as a general trend among straight males who form the social mainstream. “‘Metrosexuality is now.’—The standard of male beauty always changes with time, but now even men, who cannot go against the trend, must become beautiful” (*Hankook Ilbo*, January 9, 2004). The men referred to in this article are by no means homosexual. Articles reporting that the new male image is currently being pursued by the majority of men, who are presumed to be straight, appear to be exerting pressure on male consumers, asserting that they can safely jump on the bandwagon without fear of being suspected as gay.

Articles redefine grooming as behavior consistent with human instinct rather than a deviant behavior attributed to homosexuality, and by doing so, they successfully result in naturalizing men’s grooming. Articles asserting that “the desire to make oneself beautiful is no longer exclusive to women . . . only women’s desire to be stylish has been acknowledged as proper” (*Kyunghyang Daily News*, April 8, 2005) assume that men, like women, also have an instinct and desire for beauty and grooming. Arguing that men’s repressed instincts for grooming must be restored, these articles appear to criticize the prejudice that it is improper for men to be stylish as can be seen in the following report. “Now it’s only natural for men, too, to clean their skin twice a week with a deep cleansing mask or use skin serum or eye cream.” This article underscores anew the environmental or physiological aspects of the lives of men. Because men not only experience work-related stress and are exposed to alcohol and cigarettes, their health is also at risk: “Increased moisture loss dries out the epidermis, and extra sebum causes enlarged pores. Also, the dermis is thicker, and once wrinkles begin to appear, they are more likely to become deep and craggy” (*Dong-A Ilbo*, December 16, 2005;

Munhwa Ilbo, May 21, 2007). Through such lengthy explanatory articles, men are becoming convinced of the need to care for their skin.

The aforementioned news reports regarding the new male image were not just simply describing the changing male image, but are also actively redefining male grooming by freeing it of social stigma. When a certain style or image is presented as a symbol of the new male, male readers are encouraged to create and present a new male identity using those symbolic meanings (Woodruff-Burton and Elliott 1998). These reports exercise the power to induce male readers to actively maintain their external appearances and to purchase the necessary products. Men are openly induced to become consumers through advertising by a variety of body care industries, as well as indirect induction through these types of press articles.

Acceptance Level of the Atypical Male Image in Heterosexist Society

1) Feminine Style, Masculine Vitality

The concept of the metrosexual male, which was introduced in 2003, is defined as a man who maintains his masculinity while partially pursuing a feminine taste in beauty. Metrosexuals have been deemed “new humans” (*Dong-A Ilbo*, February 24, 2004) in the sense that they simultaneously radiate both a strong masculine and feminine image and are distinct from the *kkot minam*, a typical example of the feminization of men. What, then, are the characteristics of masculinity in the new male image, and in what manner are the characteristics of femininity being depicted?

For example, in the case of such soccer players as David Beckham or Ahn Jung-hwan, their firm bodies forged from exercise are interpreted as masculine, whereas their well-groomed skin and hair-styles are viewed as feminine. The new man, or metrosexual, must confirm his masculinity by possessing a strong, flexible, and muscular physique. The muscular body, which symbolizes men's strength and power compared to women, offsets the negative image of the *kkot minam*, who is physically weak. If he has a strong physique and healthy, bronze skin, a well-groomed man can circumvent any taunts

that he is like a woman or suspicions that he might be gay, even if he is colorfully adorned. News articles emphasizing that male celebrities who present themselves as *kkot minam* are actually all-around athletes and tough guys can be interpreted as a sign of being aware of this phenomenon. This is because articles regarding the new male image that define muscular bodies as masculine symbols must necessarily be aware of the social stigma that men who pay attention to their appearance are not, in fact, manly. In articles that address the notion of the new man, femininity is interpreted in terms of the sense of grooming or the consumption of grooming products. The more a man styles himself like Beckham, spends his evenings sipping cocktails at the latest bars, has his hair styled by a top designer at a high-end salon, wears clothes designed by famous designers, uses his wife's or girlfriend's cosmetics, has his nails done, considers shopping to be a necessity rather than a nuisance, and takes prolonged periods of time in addition to showering when preparing for work, the higher is his so-called metrosexual quotient (*Dong-A Ilbo*, August 22, 2003). Put simply, metrosexual men utilize the fashion styles that were long considered to be the exclusive demesne of women. As delineated in the article entitled, “New Men Wear Metropolitan Women” (*Munhwa Ilbo*, July 24, 2003), men who borrow things like floral, slim silhouettes, and velvet fabrics that were long considered to be expressly female styles or fabrics can assume the role of “new men.” Even if “their appearance is rough, men who have a feminine sensibility for grooming themselves with cosmetics, take care of their skin, and are comfortable with wearing tight necklaces or pink shirts are considered metrosexual” (*Dong-A Ilbo*, April 22, 2005).

However, defining a metrosexual as a “new man” who embodies both masculinity and femininity is only possible under the assumption that grooming and beautifying one's appearance is in itself a feminine act. The fact that the trend of the new male image is not an attempt to reform the traditional distinguishing signifiers of men and women can be confirmed by virtue of the way that articles associated with the new male emphasize masculine vitality. This can be applied to the following passages: “The metrosexual maintains his strong

masculine beauty while comfortably acknowledging the feminine sensibilities he [carries] within him" (*Hankook Ilbo*, January 9, 2004); "In terms of sexual identity, he is a normal man, but he accepts his feminine tastes with an open mind and enjoys them naturally in his everyday life" (*Munhwa Ilbo*, July 24, 2003).

With the same muscular chest and arms as the metrosexual, the "ubersexual" image that debuted in 2005 emphasizes rugged innate masculinity rather than a flaunting of male beauty, giving the impression of a return to traditional masculinity. The ubersexual is presented as part of a new male image defined as "a man who gives off a strong, rugged image while maintaining a gentle and stylish look" (*Munhwa Ilbo*, February 10, 2006).

Of course, the notion of "cross-sexual," which first appeared in 2006, has a more strongly feminine image when compared to previous new male images. Cross-sexuals are similar to metrosexuals in that they both evidence a great deal of interest in grooming, but cross-sexuals were defined as different from the latter in terms of having a feminine style. Cross-sexual men were described as "having long, soft, curled hair, painting their eyebrows, waxing, and wearing girdles to lift and shape their buttocks" (*Dong-A Ilbo*, January 7, 2006). The same year, Lee Jun Ki, who starred as a female impersonator in the box office smash *The King and the Clown*, appeared in the mass media with heavy make-up, long feminine hair, and large earrings. Lee was judged as "having an androgynous image while straddling sexual borders, just like in the movie" (*Kyunghyang Daily News*, January 24, 2006).

However, the majority of the articles on cross-sexuals assert that there is no need to question their true masculinity because of their looks. As evident in such titles as "Only Feminine on the Outside," those articles emphasize that cross-sexuals could be distinguished from "womanly men" who were born that way in the sense that their fashion style is feminine but their actions and speech are masculine. The social gaze that regards homosexuality as pathological certainly becomes less severe, but in a society that continues to classify non-heterosexuals as "others," one must assert one's heterosexuality in a

way that raises it above suspicion, despite following trends that are associated with homosexuality. Male heterosexuals' appropriations of "gay" style should accurately be termed feminine, not gay. In this context, young people who are looking for dramatic makeovers also follow the opinions of male designers, who "can seek out the fun of style by breaking sexual taboos," in fields such as fashion, cosmetics, and shopping (*Hankook Ilbo*, November 12, 2004).

By underscoring the fact that becoming a new male is limited to the realm of style, news articles clearly assert that the characterization of styles or images as feminine or homosexual are, in actuality, meaningless. Such articles demand that readers no longer connect a certain style with a certain group's collective identity. Articles that emphasize the fact that the realization of the new male image stops at the level of transforming one's public image do not tell readers to alter their entire lifestyles to match that of women or homosexuals. Accordingly, these articles, which encourage men to explore femininity without abrogating their masculinity, ultimately do not attempt to deconstruct the masculine/feminine dichotomy, let alone the power difference between the genders on the basis of that dichotomy.

2) Critical Discourses on Women Encouraging New Male Images

The new male images are mostly considered to constitute a "feminization of men." The image of men who are fashion-sensitive or interested in their appearance, or who enjoy feminine grooming, pretty, fine-featured men (*kkot minam*), and the phenomenon of men showing off their male bodies wearing sexy, revealing fashions or colors and designs that were previously forbidden to men, are referred to as proof of this feminization of men. This transformation can be interpreted either as androgyny, or as the relaxation of sexual boundaries that were once strictly divided (*Hankook Ilbo*, January 9, 2004). However, critical discourses also exist which does not regard this feminization of men as a positive or happy social change. They also express displeasure at the fact that women, who have thus far existed only as sexual objects for men, are now instead taking men as objects of their desires, and men are presenting themselves as sex-

ual objects through fashion and appearance choices that short-circuit or disrupt the traditional concepts of masculinity.

Taking the example of the *kkot minam*, which is representative of the feminization of men, I have assessed the critical tone of the argument. The term *kkot minam*, which was first coined in the press in 1999 to describe the characters in romance comics, is now regularly employed to refer to good-looking men. In the press, a *kkot minam* was described as a man who was “as pretty as a woman with shapely, slender figures no less than that of women, long slender legs, clear skin, strong features,” and “faint smiles.”

The term *minam* (handsome man) was formerly used to refer to good-looking, masculine men, while *kkot minam* is now used to denote attractive men with fine, feminine features. As compared to traditional male attributes, the traits of *kkot minam* are generally described as follows. Contrary to traditional male images that are represented by imposing figures, who boasted of their strength, masculine authority, and machismo—in short, men into whose arms women wished to throw themselves—the *kkot minam* are young, childlike, pretty men who have thrown off that authority—in short, men that women wish to embrace (*Munhwa Ilbo*, August 14, 2003; *Dong-A Ilbo*, May 20, 2003). If the traditional male image exaggerated strong, masculine appeal, the *kkot minam* is a new male image that stimulates the maternal instinct, appearing soft, innocent, and attentive (*Kukmin Daily*, August 30, 1999; *Hankook Ilbo*, March 12, 2002; July 22, 2002). Thus, *kkot minam* is not described as atypical men only in terms of their appearance, but also in terms of their nature.

However, if the *kkot minam* are defined by their lack of the robust masculinity that is traditionally expected, this new male image can only be seen as negative.⁴ Some reject the appellation of *kkot*

4. Interestingly enough, the femininity of the *kkot minam* is understood differently according to gender. For men, *kkot minam* represent a “good-looking feminine image,” whereas for women, they represent a “clean, put together look.” Also, while men tend to define *kkot minam* as being slender in build, women tend to see them as moderately muscular (Choi 2002). Based on this, the feminine image of *kkot minam* can be said to be stronger among men.

minam, such as male actors who convey the social aversion to the feminine vibe that the *kkot minam* emanates. Won Bin, an actor who embodies the *kkot minam* style, complained, “I really, really hate that word. I want to look masculine” (*Kyunghyang Daily News*, February 7, 2003). As can be seen in the following passage, the soft, fine womanly features regarded as specific to *kkot minam* are interpreted as a weakness that makes it difficult for men to go out into the world and weather the ups and downs of life. This perceived weakness effectively keeps them from being the subject of women’s respect and reliance. This article predicts that a strong masculine image will resurface as the economic recession worsens, and suggests that the *kkot minam* image will not replace the traditional one, while being relegated to a mere fad.⁵

The pretty and frail *kkot minam* can be held in the palms of their [women’s] hands and fawned over like dolls, but only when women are strong and capable. When times are difficult, as they are now, women want to rely upon men who seem like able to silently support them (*Hankook Ilbo*, October 9, 2003).

As seen in the news report above, men are now being consumed as objects of women’s sexual desires. The new male images, including *kkot minam*, have been reported in the press as being cheered on principally by women, as can be seen in such expressions as “Pretty men with the so-called *kkot minam* style are stirring the hearts of women,” “Metrosexuals are 21st century hunks,” and “Ubersexual, Women’s Most Ideal Type.” These articles imply that the new male images are becoming objects of women’s sexual enjoyment. The arti-

5. Among the general public as well, it is difficult to say whether the *kkot minam* is spreading as a new male image worth pursuing. In Choe Ji-seong’s study (2002), no more than 24% of men wanted to become *kkot minam*, and only 25% of the women preferred to date *kkot minam*. The most common reasons given by women who did not prefer to date *kkot minam* were “dating a handsome man is troublesome” (about 50%) and “they look like women” (about 37%). Judging from these findings, the stereotype that beauty is a feminine trait and men should look manly is as strong as ever.

cles lament the fact that women, once only the sexual objects of men, have now risen in status to the extent that they can openly express their sexual desires for *kkot minam*-type men, whereas men have been downgraded to objects of women's sexual amusement.

Articles reporting on the social aversion to images of men who adorn themselves in a feminine way also convey an aversion to non-traditional male images. "Men who use cosmetics" are perceived as "unsightly," and regarding the cross-sexual style in particular, it has been reported that "many people are revolted by it because it is sleazy and hard to accept because of its womanliness" (*Hankook Ilbo*, March 3, 2006; January 19, 2007).

These articles also lament the fact that clothing styles that show off men's waists or buttocks, or that reveal their muscular chests, or that are made from see-through materials (such as chiffon or mesh) are furthering a commercialization of men's bodies, in a similar way that women's bodies have been commercialized. These articles express dissatisfaction with or fear of the exposure and display of men's bodies and sexual appeal, while women's social positions have risen to the point that they can appreciate men's bodies as sexual objects.

The sexual commodification of men tend to be criticized as an attempt to curry favor with female consumers, who are enjoying increased economic and purchasing power (*Kukmin Daily*, June 4, 1999; *Hankook Ilbo*, October 14, 1999). As the socio-economic status of women rises, their changed view of men appears to promote the feminization of men. It has been reasoned that, as women become increasingly economically self-sufficient, not only men's economic power but their appearances are valued, and men, too, are left with no choice but to groom themselves in order to meet the changed expectations of women (*Dong-A Ilbo*, August 22, 2003). Women's preference for soft men like the *kkot minam* or the image of the sensual, grooming male is believed to arise from an absence of the need to submit to men who evidence macho qualities or patriarchal authority in return for reliance on men (*Hankook Ilbo*, July 22, 2003).

However, have the "new men" images really been created only

to please newly empowered women? It is assumed that the male images of alluring eyes, refined looks and trained body aroused women's erotic excitement (Yang and Yang 2006, 333-335). Lee and Kim (2001) even argue that women do not just stop at viewing erotic images of men that are intended for homosexuals, but began to make erotic images of men for themselves (168). They interpreted the changes in these images as representing the change in the power structure of gender. This interpretation is based on Berger's argument that the relationship between the object being shown and the subject that sees reflects a power dynamic. In a male-dominated society, the woman's naked body was always intended for male viewers and women were treated as visual objects in a scene (Lee and Kim 2001, 168). However, according to Bordo (1999), the fact that men are becoming the objects of a sexual gaze does not mean that women are enjoying visual pleasure. As women used to have almost no opportunities to objectify men, they are still unfamiliar with viewing men's bodies.⁶

Summary and Discussion

The vast array of new male images that began with the *kkot minam* in 2001 in the Korean press continued on to the metrosexual in 2003, the ubersexual in 2005, and the cross-sexual in 2006. It is no exaggeration to assert news that news articles addressing the image of the new man were, in a word, a component of the project of "making a new man," which encompasses a promotion both of grooming regi-

6. Furthermore, in most ads, men are depicted in images that suggest they are infatuated with their own bodies and sensuality without being aware of others. Rather than being objects of women's viewing pleasure, men's bodies seem to exist for men themselves, who are drunk with narcissism. Even when they are aware of observers, the men in the ads do not give off an image of being drawn by love for or interest in the viewer, but rather look the viewer in the eye and express their resistance to being objectified. This description follows the typical formula for depicting men in mass media (Bordo 1999, 186-200).

mens and consumer activities. As a medium that wields a great deal of public authority, newspapers report on the new male image while redefining male grooming. First, by highlighting the fact that men's bodies are also being incorporated into physical capitalization, these representations have had the effect of making men who do not groom themselves feel apprehensive. Second, while designating beautiful, popular stars or professional men as leaders of the new male trend and address their lifestyles, articles utilize the strategy of class distinction. By highlighting the class distinctions among men, the formula of reporting on body care as a particular taste and privilege that can only be enjoyed by men of an affluent social class can be seen as having the effect of weakening the feminine image connected to bodily grooming. Third, while being defined not as a behavior seen only among homosexuals, but as one also shared among heterosexual men who form the social mainstream, men's grooming is publicized as natural, given its redefinition as behavior that is resonant with "human instinct" rather than with the "deviance" of homosexuality.

However, becoming a new man is limited to the realm of style and is reported in a manner that underscores masculine vitality. While Korean news articles simply encourage readers to engage in an atypical image trend, they do not encourage them to fully explore atypical lifestyles. Therefore, it would be too hasty to interpret the trend of images that appear homosexual as signifying that the level of social acceptance of homosexuals has actually grown. If change stop at the level of a mere image, that is, an external appearance that is nothing more than a style designating a fabricated social identity, then it is not true change (Chaney 1996). Furthermore, in contrast to Western society, only the homosexual style and image can be consumed in mainstream Korean culture, whereas not even the finest crack has yet appeared in the heterosexual hegemony. In this society, the homosexual image trend itself only reveals that consumerism's influence is so strong that even sexual "differences" are being commercialized.

Within the same context, it would also be inappropriate to deem the existing gradual social change as a "feminization of men." This

designation gives the impression that the potential for men to choose to be like women is growing, and therefore the dichotomized system of sexual differentiation may be collapsing. With its incessant emphasis on masculine vitality, the new men discourses suggest that there is no intent to disturb the androcentric and heterosexist social order that has long been regarded as "natural," or to abandon the structural privileges that men and heterosexuals have collectively enjoyed. As Baudrillard (1993) noted, if the prosaic symbols of trends circulate without any meaning or logic, that change cannot but become a frightful chaos.

According to Simmel, changing trends are the result of class competition over appearance. However, the new male image trend is difficult to explain through this interpretation or through the theory of trickle-down trends. When seen through these explanatory frameworks, there is a danger of interpreting the new male image trend as the longing of men for feminine culture or the longing of heterosexuals for homosexual culture. The current trend is nothing more than the introduction of an unfamiliar or novel image and it does not signify a boost in the social acceptance of female or homosexual culture as a whole. This is all the more so if social acceptance means the conscious affinity between groups mutually distinguishable by a certain ideology, value, or inclination (Chaney 1996). It is hard to say that homosexuals are successfully spreading or transplanting their culture into mainstream Korean society. Rather, Korea's consumption industry and mass media are merely sensitive to the changes in Western society that promote the image of the grooming male.

Further, the new male image trend will continue insofar as it is linked with ever-changing fashion fads in search of something new. As fashion represents a visual record of postmodern culture with fluid, continuously changing symbols (Craik 1994), the male images that rely on this attribute of fashion must continually change, then there will continue to be an array of new male images.

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