

Grooming and Status Consumption: How the Groomed Body is used as an Object in Projecting Status

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Abstract:

The theories of Torstein Veblen and Pierre Bourdieu have been used separately in consumption studies, and are often treated as alternative ways of examining status consumption. This study examines the concepts of these theorists simultaneously within the domain of personal grooming. The research was a social constructivist qualitative study of urban and semi-urban grooming conscious youth, both males and females, aged between 18-30 years, who belong to two social strata – upper and lower – in Sri Lanka. The research findings reveal that Sri Lankan youth use the groomed body to reach their desired status; however, the way the groomed body is used to gain status is different between the two social classes. The upper class has a broader definition of grooming which includes subtle elements of consumption knowledge that enables them to follow a social differentiation strategy to gain status. In contrast, the lower class relies on the traditional definition of grooming which is limited to the enhancement of outer appearance, leading them to follow a social adaptation strategy to gain status from the groomed body. These dynamics indicate a certain degree of interconnectedness between concepts advanced by Veblen and Bourdieu.

Keywords: Status consumption, Groomed body, Social emulation, Social adaptation, Social differentiation, Cultural capital, habitus

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