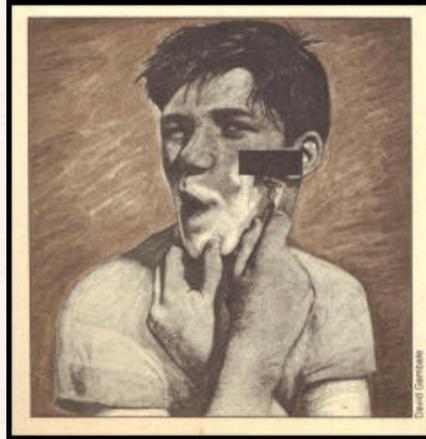


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OUR BEARDS, OUR SELVES

BY CHRIS HALLINGER



As we grow into adulthood, our bodies go through a striking transformation, one that will have a profound effect on us for the rest of our lives. Our beards start to grow. Let's face it: we all want to have sexual relationships and jobs, and we're not going to get anywhere unless we shave. So we're going to have to practice some kind of beard control. In order to make an intelligent choice, we have to look at what methods are available and decide between them according to their safety and cost. No one method is perfect for every man.

In the old days men had beards whether they wanted them or not, and they suffered in silence. Look at pictures of men in the 1890s: even the presidents had beards. Now, with the advent of modern shaving technology and the raising of men's consciousness, we have new freedom and power that we never knew in the past. We are gaining power over our own faces and the freedom to choose when and where we will have a beard.

The first step toward taking control of our faces is getting to know them. We must lose our inhibitions about touching our own bodies. The best way to begin is with a personal facial examination.

Personal Facial Examination. Usually this is done in the privacy of the bathroom or bedroom, in the early morning or just before bathing. However, it can be performed anytime, as often as you like, alone or in groups. All you need is a mirror and a fluorescent light. Don't be embarrassed about exploring the entire facial area. There is nothing to be ashamed about; we are all curious about our bodies. With some practice you can learn to find and identify your mouth, ears, neck, and other vital areas. Soon you will be able to recognize and understand what your beard is doing.

The first self-examination may prove to be a joyous and thrilling event, as this college student reports: "At first I was repulsed by the idea. Nice guys don't touch themselves 'up there.' But once I started, it was fascinating. I enjoyed it. I found out that I have nostrils. Two of them! It was the most wonderful experience of my life."

It is also important to learn the scientific terminology. The American Barber Association has tried to keep us ignorant for years so that we will be helpless and dependent on it. Now it is time for us to educate ourselves so that we can speak to our barbers on their terms. Jerry, a 25-year-old single man, tells a typical story: "I told my barber, 'Just a trim.

I want it to come halfway down my ears.' He was, of course, shocked. 'Where did you find out about ears?' he wanted to know immediately. 'What are you, some kind of cosmetology student?'"

Now let's look at the different methods of beard control.

The Electrical Scraping Device (ESD).

What It Is: An ESD consists of a motor that is encased in plastic, a row of metal blades, and a coiled-up electrical cord. The blades may be either single-file or rotary, stationary or floating. The whole business is enclosed in a case, with instructions and a warranty.

How to Use It. Take the ESD out of the case. Attach the cord to the device (follow directions). Plug it into a 110 outlet and shave.

Advantages. It is quick. It is convenient. It is safe. There is no cutting or bleeding of the face.

Disadvantages. It sounds terrible. Most ESDs sound like chainsaws, which may not be the noise you want to hear at 7:00 a.m. It can be irritating to the skin. Many men report that they have to keep going over the same places until it hurts so much they have to stop. It is expensive. An ESD can run as high as \$50, not including maintenance.

Effectiveness. ESDs have a low effectiveness rating, getting only 70 to 80 percent of the beard. The effectiveness varies according to how sharp the blades are and how hard you push. The electrical scraping device was once considered to be the ultimate solution the problem of beard control. However, many men are becoming disenchanted with ESDs and are going back to more "old-fashioned" methods.

The Blade.

What It Is. This device consists of a thin piece of metal that is incredibly sharp, attached to a T-shaped holder. The blade can be single- or double-edged, and it can be either injector or manual. It can be made out of chromium, tungsten steel, Swedish steel, U.S. Steel, or melted swords. The handle can be made out of plastic or metal. Some handles are hollow, so that you can whistle into them, while some are not. Consult your barber or the nearest football player for advice on choosing the correct device for you.

How to Use It. Warning: It must be used with some kind of foam or gel.

Wash your face with hot water. The water temperature should be as close to boiling as possible. Apply the foam or gel to the facial area. This must be done within five minutes of shaving every time you shave. The whole whisker area must be covered. Now you are ready to shave. You should stand erect, in a well-lit area, with a source of water close at hand. You should be reasonably awake and alert. The object is to take off as much beard as possible while leaving behind as much skin as possible.

Advantages. It doesn't make an unpleasant noise. No electricity is needed. It can be used while camping or in developing nations. It is inexpensive to purchase.

Disadvantages. It must be used with foam. It can be dangerous. Cutting and bleeding are common, especially among the new users. There are possible dangerous side effects: your hands and face can be burnt by scalding water.

Effectiveness. The blade has a very good effectiveness rating: as high as 90 percent of the beard, if used with caution. Despite the hassles involved with its use, many men rely on its simplicity and effectiveness, just as our grandfathers did.

Astrological Beard Control. This new and controversial method of beard control relies on astrological charts, knowing the exact hour and location of your birth, and a lot of luck. Any results from this method are as yet unproven by science, although some men swear by it. We don't recommend astrological beard control, unless you want to be the proud owner of a new goatee.

Abstinence. Abstinence is a perfectly legitimate choice for some. You simply go without shaving. You'll be miserable in the summer, your face will feel hot and dirty, and you'll look like a derelict-even with a suit on. It's up to you.

Men's Consciousness. Times have changed. Our society has become more permissive. Matters that were once never mentioned in public can now be talked about openly; we can speak frankly and plainly about beard control. Parents are telling their children the facts about their whiskers so that they won't grow up learning half-truths at the street corner. You even see ads for masculine hygiene products in newspapers and on television.

It is important to communicate with our partners and our friends. We need to support each other and to talk about our needs and feelings. Here is one man's experience of the value of group support:

"I was in the barbershop, waiting to have a whiskerectomy. I was very nervous, I felt isolated and afraid, with nothing to comfort me but old issues of Field and Stream. I looked at my brothers in the room and realized that despite our differences in age and background, there was a common bond between us. After we talked awhile and shared some experiences, we discovered that we had many similar ideas and feelings. We all felt that the Eagles had an improved defense this year and that they had a good chance for a play-off spot. But what troubled us was their need for some offensive firepower, somebody who - could break away for a long gainer. After our rap session, I felt relaxed and comfortable. I knew I was no longer alone."

Women and Beard Control. Unfortunately, even in our "liberated" society, almost all of the re-sponsibility for beard control still falls on the men. We are the ones who must go to the barbershop and to the drugstore; we must go through all the hassles ourselves. It is often a strain on us-physically, emotionally, and monetarily. We do it for their benefit as much as for our own, but many women will just shrug and say, "That's your problem." It's no wonder that we feel angry and bitter.

