

Salon Content

Girl Power

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By: [Bonnie Gibbs](#)
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Ask a stylist to name some of the industry's brightest stars, and chances are they'll cite veterans like Serge Normant, Orlando Pita, Robert Cromean or FrE9dE9ric Fekkai. Few would argue that these big-name talents deserve recognition, but in an overwhelmingly female industry, why aren't more women in the spotlight?



That's a question William George has been trying to answer for the past year. As owner and manager of Boston's James Joseph Salon and James Joseph Studio, he's seen his male stylists nab award after award, while equally talented female hairdressers have gone largely unrecognized. "I believe there's a bias in the salon industry and in the media," he says. "We're used to seeing male hairdressers on TV or in magazines—not women. It doesn't seem right to me."

Stereotypes are only part of the problem. Men often command more attention also because they aggressively promote themselves, George says. "They put themselves out there, and often winning awards is more important to them."

Female clients also tend to prefer male stylists, says Anu Prestonia, founder and president of Khamit Kinks salon in New York City. "Opposites attract—women like men, and men like women," she explains. "I had a male stylist with a fiercely loyal following among women. They said when he shampooed their hair, it felt like their head was in a machine because he had big, strong hands."

Still, women are starting to come to the forefront of the industry, even if they have to work harder than men to prove themselves, says Antoinette Beenders, global style director for Aveda. She should know. Besides being the first woman to win British Hairdresser of the Year in 2004, she was one of the first female stylists doing hair for runway shows in the early '90s. "My generation of female stylists is going through the pioneering phase," she says. "The next generation will gain more ground, and by the third generation, this will all be normal."

Beenders says she is already seeing a change of perception among customers. "As consumers get more educated about the industry, they won't be smooched into a mediocre haircut because the stylist is an attractive man," she says.

There are signs that the industry isn't far behind. Recently, Aveda teamed up with Neill Corp. and The Salon People to host South Beach Jam Eve: A Celebration of Women in Beauty. Among the guest stylists at the all-female event were Beenders, Vivienne Mackinder, Rita Rusk, Marjorie Clarke and Cynthia Winston.

Events like this are a good start, but as Beenders points out, there's still more to be done. "It's important that we send out the right message to other woman that you can get to the top of this industry," she says.

As salon owners, how can you ensure all of your employees are getting the attention they deserve? "Put female stylists in front of editors and promote them more," George suggests, "not just those who ask for it."

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