



2013 Global Wet Shaving Report

by the **Straight Razor Magazine**

2013 Wet Shaving Report

Results of a global wet shaving survey

Straight Razor Magazine

This report is dedicated to wet shavers worldwide.



Contents

Executive Summary	1
Survey	4
1. Introduction	5
2. Demographics	6
3. Why do people wet-shave?	8
4. Online Communities	10
4.1. Opinions on shave product reviews	11
4.2. Linkages among the various communities	11
5. Razors	13
5.1. Razor types in use	13
5.2. Safety razors	14
5.3. Razor blades	16
6. Straight Razors	18
7. Brushes	20
8. Lather	21
9. Collectors	23
10. Spending Habits	24
11. Concluding Remarks	25
Appendix	26
A. Acknowledgements	28
B. Survey Methodology	29

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Straight Razor Magazine's mission is to provide an objective, independent source for information pertaining to traditional ways of shaving. Our focus is on shaving with straight razors, but many of our reviews and interviews are also of interest to the users of safety razors or other modern tools for shaving.

Executive Summary

The Internet is famous for providing ever smaller communities of interest with a way to coalesce and communicate, as well as providing merchants with a means to sell goods targeted to these niche communities¹. The growth of these communities may be seen by those within them as proof that the community matches a growing worldwide trend in love for, and commerce in, products specific to the community. Is such thinking myopic, deluded, and self-congratulatory, or at least somewhat correct? *Straight Razor Magazine* addresses the matter by surveying the online world of wet shaving. We have gathered empirical data on the habits of individuals and groups who have either found, returned to, or never left the world of traditional shaving. While the survey does not address the median consumer who probably shaves with cartridges or disposable razors, it will enable us to track the growth of wet shaving and the trends within its membership.

561 respondents, nearly all from North America and Europe, have provided some insight into the current state of wet shaving. The median age is between 35 and 44, with the age distribution skewing slightly to the right (i.e. older), which is expected since there is a lower age limit for those who shave. 82% of respondents report an *excellent* shave experience, though over 3% reported a mediocre or worse shave experience.

Despite the (likely atypical among the world wet shaving population) emphasis these respondents place on straight razor shaving, many still use cartridges some of the time, though very few exclusively use cartridge system razors. Straight razors and double-edge disposable blade (“DE”) razors comprise the vast majority of shaving tools in everyday use by respondents. The several skill sets and complicated nature of the straight shave deter the majority of those who do not shave with a straight razor. For now, badger remains the king of brush materials, though synthetic brushes are making a strong showing; given that synthetic brushes were almost nonexistent a few years ago, clearly synthetic manufacturers and consumers are growing. Unsurprisingly, the lubricating qualities of a lather are most important to our respondents, though an unadorned “coefficient of friction” is not the only characteristic that matters. Two-thirds of those surveyed typically use hard soap for building lather.

Most individuals value the quality of the shave over that of pressurized foam and a cartridge system, though almost as many appreciate the traditional appeal and individuality of wet shaving. Perhaps reflecting these latter characteristics, half of respondents consider themselves straight razor collectors.

The majority of respondents find a small set of tools and accessories, and stick to them. A few pluralists try everything, perhaps in search of the best pairings of razors/blades and lathers, but in general, people find a few products that work and then use them. People typically spend between 5 and 30 Euro (USD6–40) per month on shaving supplies.

¹Prior to online shopping, most merchants had to target the “median shopper”, whereas now retailers can sell to groups that large businesses would consider “outliers” or “noise.” Businesses that service small niche markets take advantage of the “long tails” of the distribution of Internet denizens.

4. How often do you shave? *
In an average week.

5. When do you usually shave?
What time of day?

6. How is your wet shaving experience going? *
On a scale from 1 to 5, with three being "just okay."

1 2 3 4 5

Exceptionally poorly. I hate it. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Very well – I'm never going back!

7. For how many years have you shaved with a razor other than a multi-blade cartridge? *

8. What about traditional wet shaving appeals to you? *
Pick all that apply.

☐ Lower cost overall

☐ I get a closer shave

☐ I have sensitive skin

☐ My skin is easily irritated by artificial products

☐ Shaving this way is manlier

☐ Environmental concerns

☐ Better variety of products

☐ Better smelling products

☐ I prefer all-natural products

☐ Makes me feel more individualistic

☐ The tradition appeals to me

☐ I have friends in the online forums

☐ Fewer razor bumps or ingrown hairs

☐ Other:

Figure E1.: Questions 4 through 8 of the English language survey.

Survey

1. Introduction

Beginning in August 2013, *Straight Razor Magazine* contacted numerous online shaving fora to gather and report information about the condition and habits of the wet-shaving world. Many traditional shavers responded and provided data from which we can build a worldwide picture. These results come from a collaboration among a global set of shaving enthusiasts, and website administrators. The results are probably not truly representative of the wet shaving world at large, due to a hostile reception from the owners of several notable shaving fora who did not want to participate in a public good. The sampling technique is also not truly random; everyone who took the survey wanted to take it, and are much more likely to be members of those fora in which this survey was publicized. Such sampling methods are “convenience samples”, “snowball samples”, and/or “straw polls”, each having characteristics that match our “opt-in” approach to the survey. While the results are perhaps not globally representative, the large sample size limits the impact of the convenience sample, except as noted.

The survey itself was conducted in three languages ([English](#), [French](#), and [German](#)), with versions in Russian and Polish yet to be launched. These new surveys, and subsequent additions to the survey responses, will be accessioned into the data at intervals. The survey and all work to assemble it were done by volunteers (albeit several with doctoral and professional degrees in relevant fields), none of whom receive any benefit from this work.



2. Demographics

561 individuals have taken the survey to this point, nearly all from Europe and North America, with a few Australians and a selection of paranoids who would not even tell us on what continent they could be found by our “[black helicopters](#).”

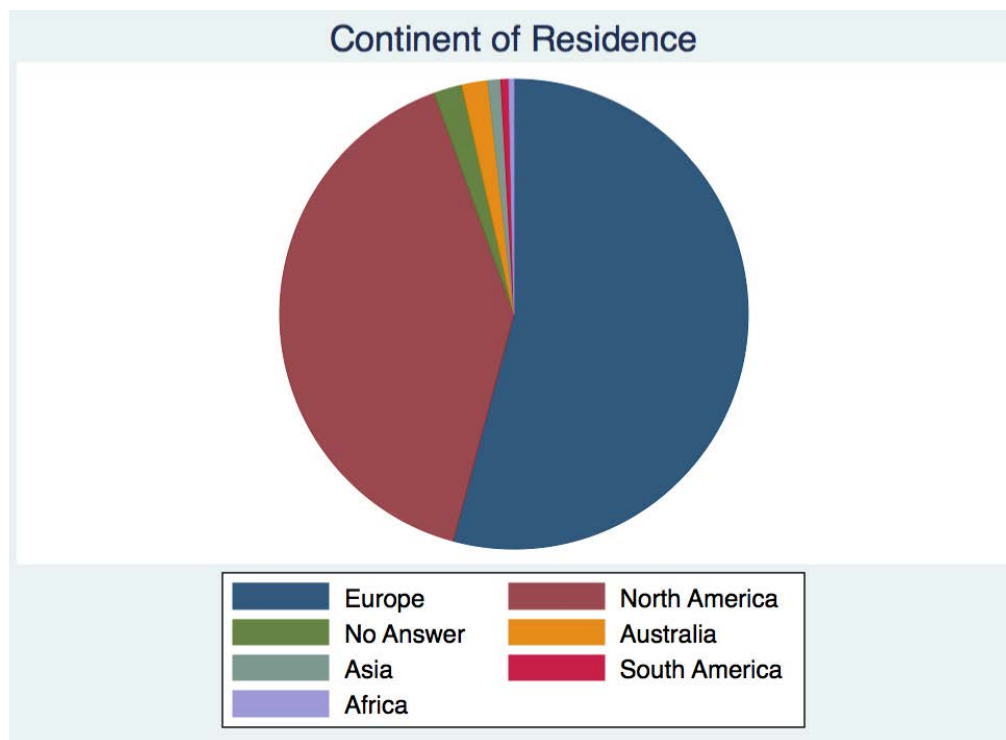


Figure 2.1.: Regional locations of respondents.

The resurgence of wet shaving has created a pulse of users in a younger demographic, while those who were shaving when cartridge razors arrived (i.e. those born prior to 1960) may have hung on to the old ways or rediscovered wet shaving more recently. The nature of this survey—online, available only to those with network connections—means that some groups might be under-represented among those who wet shave. However, as this survey is intended to measure opinions among wet shavers who spend time online, such sampling concerns only mean this sample measures a slightly different population.

Demographics Summary

Age	Freq.	Percent
Under 18	4	< 1%
18-25	49	8.7%
26-34	143	25.5%
35-44	153	27.7%
45-54	112	20.0%
55-64	66	11.8%
65 or older	23	4.0%
No Response	11	2.0%

The median age of survey respondents is between 35 and 44 years of age.

The largest group of respondents has been shaving for between 16 and 30 years, but many people over 40 years of age took the survey.	Years Since First Shave	Percent of Respondents
	16-30 years	32.1%
	3-5 years	10.7%
	6-15 years	21.4%
	Just started	8.7%
	More than 30 years	27.1%

Years Wet Shaving without Cartridges	Percent of Respondents
Less than 1 year	22.3%
1-3 years	37.0%
4-10 years	24.4%
More than 10 years	4.0%
None (I use a cartridge.)	2.3%

Well over half of respondents have been wet shaving without a cartridge for less than 3 years.

Those engaged in the practice and hobby of wet-shaving tend to lack deep experience with the art. This finding suggests that mentoring is in demand, and that online fora are the new apprenticeships.

3. Why do people wet-shave?

Unsurprisingly, the utilitarian nature of wet shaving is most important: it delivers a better shave. Some respondents emphasized the improvement over other shaving methods. Almost as many respondents who value the wet shave’s quality also value a “traditional” practice. Others (with little overlap) prefer the individualistic cachet or sense of self that wet shaving provides. Users were free to select more than one answer, so this list is not organized by the intensity of a single preference, but rather the plurality of preferences among respondents.

Reason	Percent of Respondents
Closer shave	78%
The tradition appeals	74%
Individuality	62%
Lower cost	51%
It’s a manly skill	50%
Better product selection	47%
Better smelling products	44%
Fewer razor bumps or ingrown hairs	35%
Sensitive skin	30%
Environmental concerns	26%
I prefer natural products	24%
Friends in online forums	16%
Artificial products irritate my skin	13%

Percentages sum to greater than one hundred percent because respondents may select more than one answer.

Notably, the French-language respondents to question #8 placed a stronger emphasis on the aesthetics of shaving in their comments. Some selections:

Why do you wet shave? (French language)

- “A passion for preparing blade edges and ancient objects.”
- “The cutting edge of a razor.”
- “The beauty of the straight razor.”
- “The pleasure of using beautiful things.”



4. Online Communities

Many online communities specialize by some subsection of shaving (region, or implement), while others are more generalist, appealing to all aspects. Some provide encyclopedias to enhance their value as a destination or portal. Coupe Chou Club and Artisan Shaving members are the most pluralist, with members there more likely to be members of other clubs. The same is true for Badger & Blade and Razor and Stone, though to a smaller degree.

Forum	Percent of Respondents
Straight Razor Place	44%
Badger & Blade	35%
Nass Rasur	23%
Coupe Chou Club	15%
Gut-Rasiert.de	13%
The Shave Den	10%
The Big Shave	10%
The Shave Nook	9%
Artisan Shaving	6%
Razor and Stone	5%
Google Plus Straight Razors	5%
Shave My Face	4%
G+ Traditional Shaving	3%
Reddit r/wicked_edge	2%
The Original Safety Too	2%
The Shaving Room (UK)	2%

Percentages sum to greater than one hundred percent because respondents may belong to more than one forum.

Beyond the larger online communities, there are numerous smaller communities (at least one respondent listed the “Shotgun World” forum). These communities are not listed for brevity, although the survey’s authors did not expect Facebook outposts of the various fora to be considered separate communities to which respondents might belong. Future iterations of the survey will include some of the more popular “not listed” communities.

4.1. Opinions on shave product reviews

There was no overall consensus on the best source for reviews online, possibly due to omitted options in the survey¹. “None of these” took first place with 44% of the voting, with Straight Razor Place in second with 27 percent. Badger & Blade’s user reviews took third, with 12 percent.

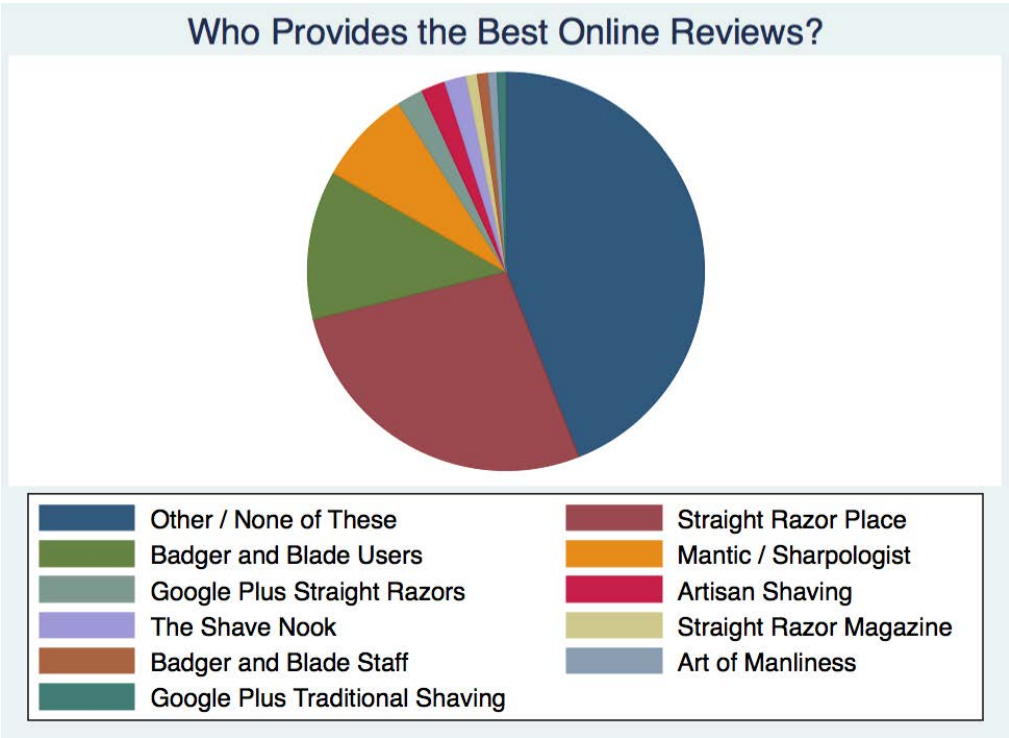


Figure 4.1.: Respondents’ opinions of shave gear review content.

4.2. Linkages among the various communities

The online world has several large nodes and a series of smaller ones, all with varying levels of interconnectedness. The following graph illustrates the amount of pluralism (size of each circle) and common members (width and redness of the linking lines). Communities with members that belong to few other fora tend to be near the periphery, while large, pluralist groups tend to be nearer the center of the diagram.

¹ We apologize for not including Nassrasur.com and Coupe Chou Club in the original survey answers. –eds.

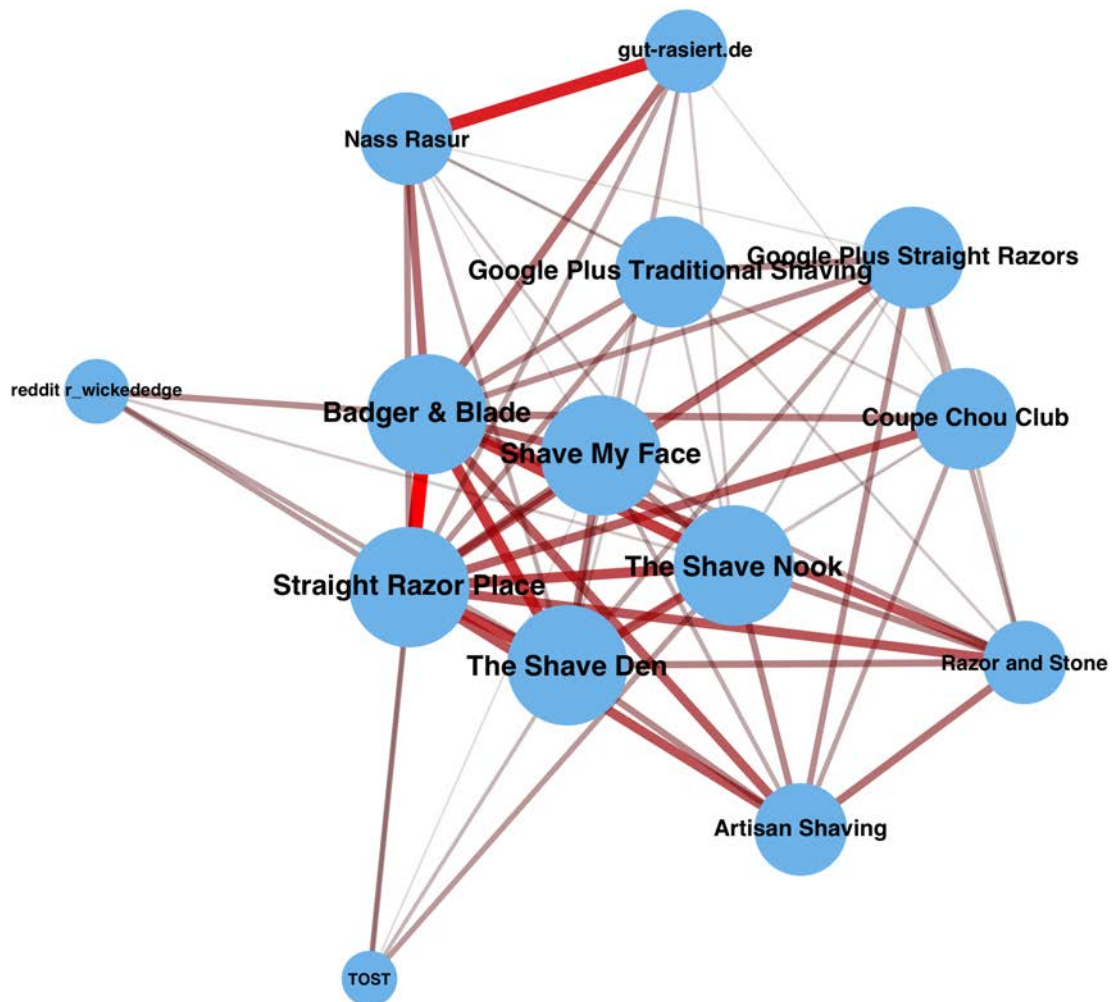


Figure 4.2.: Social network graph of the online communities. Linkages represent common memberships. Brighter reds and wider lines indicate larger percentages of common memberships. Larger circles (“nodes”, “vertices”) indicate larger levels of interconnected relationships among groups.

5. Razors

5.1. Razor types in use

About 62% of respondents maintain a DE razor in their kit. 71% use a straight razor (this result is probably not typical for the wet shaving community at large). 11% of respondents use a cartridge razor at least some of the time.

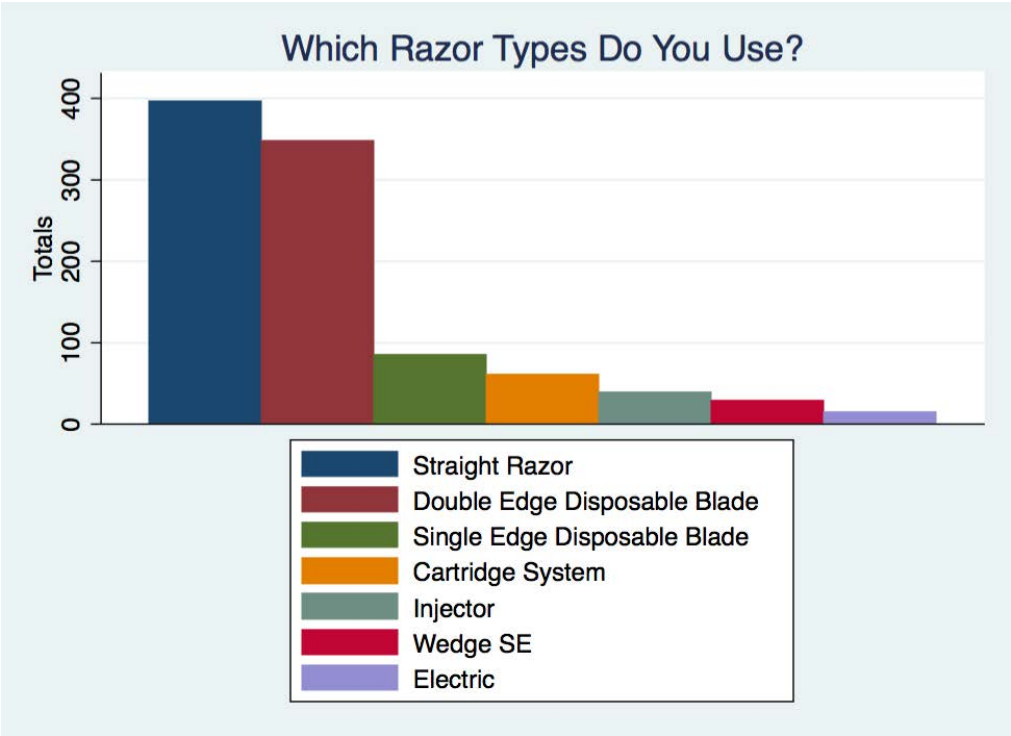


Figure 5.1.: Respondents' razor ownership, unranked by preference.

5.2. Safety razors

Merkur occupies the top spot among favorite safety razors with those who expressed a preference, at almost 22 percent (although “None of these options” finished first at 35 percent); Gillette finishes third at under 16 percent.

A personal favorite razor does not correlate strongly with using only a single razor, however. Respondents who use safety razors typically use more than one razor regularly. North Americans are significantly more likely ($p < 0.001$) to use single-edge disposable (“SE”) and single-edge injector-style razors than Europeans.



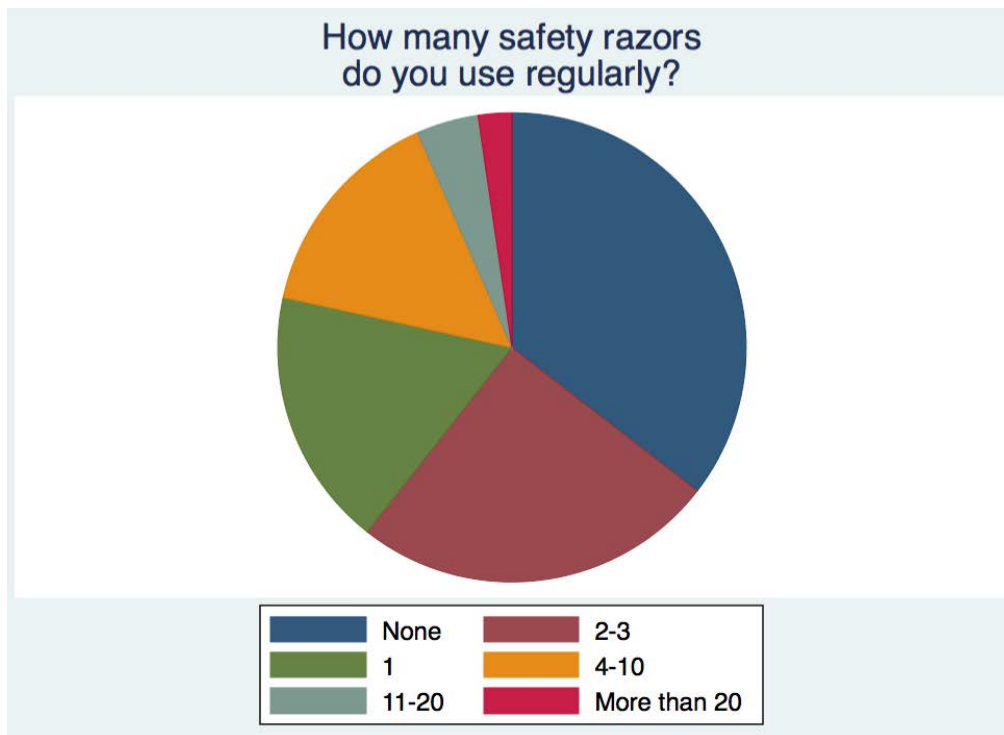


Figure 5.2.: Respondents' safety razor count.



5.3. Razor blades

When these respondents purchase blades, 41% buy 50 or more at a time (almost double the rate of buying either 5 to 10 at a time, and double that of buying 11 to 50 at once); the respondents generally look ahead when making purchases of items without a “shelf life”, with a smaller group making purchases as needed (one or two tucks at a time).

The largest group of respondents keeps no disposable blades (i.e. they use straight razors, cartridges, or wedge safety razors). Respondents who use disposable blades tend to stockpile them, but not by a large majority over other groups. There is no significant difference among regions when purchasing disposable razor blades ($p = 0.1$), although a larger sample size might reveal a significant difference.

Disposable Blades Owned (Count)	Percent of Respondents
1–10	13.6%
11–50	15.2%
51–100	11.8%
More than 100	24.8%
<i>None</i>	34.8%



For those respondents who use disposable blades, when they find a disposable blade brand they like, they stick to it and experiment only a little. The survey does not distinguish among blade prices or quality. As above, there are no significant differences among regions when examining the counts of blade brands in a respondent's supply.

Disposable Blades Brands (Count)	Percent of Respondents
1–5	42.1%
6–10	18.2%
More than 10	5.0%
<i>None</i>	34.8%



6. Straight Razors

A strong majority (60%) of respondents use a straight razor at least some of the time, indicating a somewhat biased/skewed sample among those who wet shave. *In this sample*, North Americans are significantly more likely ($p < 0.001$) to shave with a straight razor than Europeans, though the participation rates of online communities specializing in straight razors is quite high in this version of the survey and this figure may not be representative of the true average rate of straight shaving. However, for those who do not shave with straight razors, “Too much trouble” trumps both danger and expense. The detail-oriented nature of the skill set and the diverse sets of knowledge and sub-skills deters the majority of safety-razor shavers.

If it is desirable to expand the population of straight razor users, those who wish to recruit others to straight shaving would do well to help neophytes overcome the perceived barriers to entry. If it is “too much trouble” to start, we should offer instruction in proper technique and stropping, and later, proper honing. The neophyte need not be able to return a smiling edged, rusty razor to shave-ready. Being able to provide touch-ups and tell the difference between edges that need only stropping and those that require honing is enough. These skills are difficult to convey in videos and easier in person, if schedules and travel times allow it.

Among those who do use straight razors for shaving, there are two obvious sub-populations: those who shave nearly exclusively with straights (a bit less than half of the respondents), and those almost never do (about one third).

How Often Do You Straight Shave?	Percent of Respondents
0–1%	27.81%
2–19%	9.63%
20–50%	8.56%
51–85%	9.09%
86–100%	44.92%

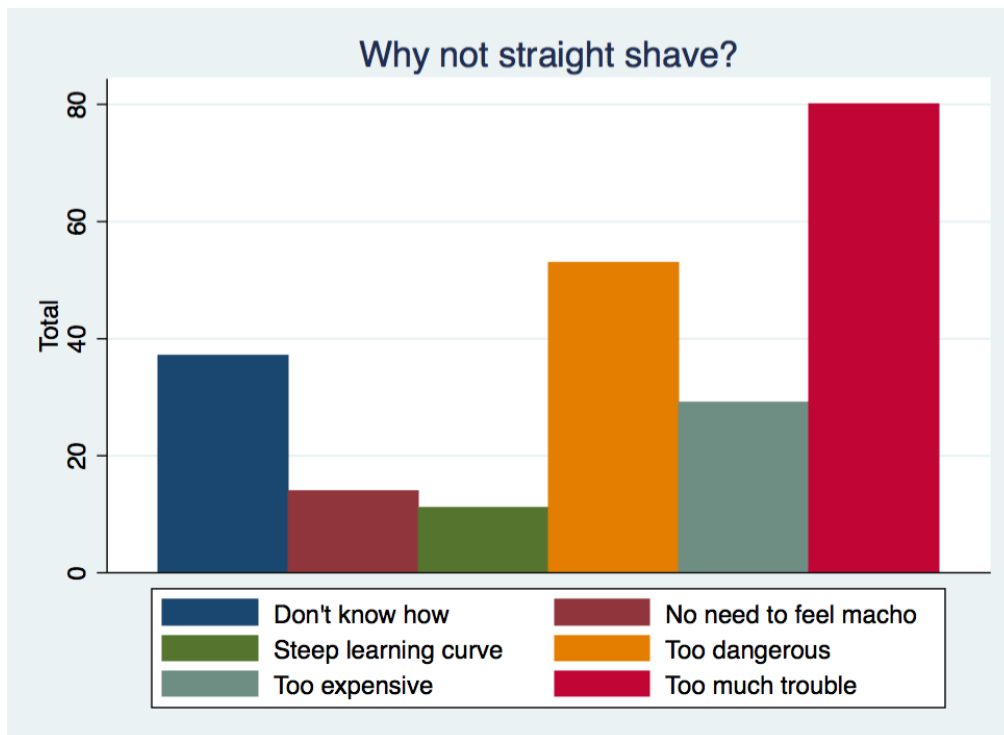


Figure 6.1.: Respondents' reasons for not shaving with a straight razor.

Have You Honed a Straight Razor?	Percent of Respondents
-------------------------------------	---------------------------

Yes	55.3%
No	16.2%
<i>No Answer</i>	28.5%

Over half of straight shavers have honed at least one straight razor.

Of those who own, collect, and/or use straight razors (again, well over half of respondents), most own between 1 and 5 razors or more than 10.

Straight Razor Count	Percent of Respondents
-------------------------	---------------------------

1-5	30.1%
6-10	11.4%
More than 10	30.1%
<i>None</i>	28.3%

7. Brushes

The surprise when asking about the brush type owned by respondents is the increase in market share among synthetic brushes. Until recently, synthetic bristles were entirely unacceptable for making lather, but improvements in fiber manufacturing processes and the recognition of a market for vegetarian or vegan products have provided consumers with greater choice in shaving brushes.

Brush Type	Percent of Respondents
Badger	84%
Boar	32%
Synthetic	16%
Other Animal Fiber	9%

Percentages sum to greater than one hundred percent because people may own more than one brush type.



8. Lather

The most important characteristic of shave lather is lubrication, accounting for almost half of all responses. The somewhat difficult to define “cushion” came in second place, with almost one quarter of the vote. There is a modest dispute among those who define “cushion”, with some emphasizing the “protection that lets me make small mistakes with no consequences”, and others defining it as “the physical resistance of a lather to downward pressure; a sturdy lather.” Another answer to this question is “stability of a lather”, which is similar to physical supportiveness.

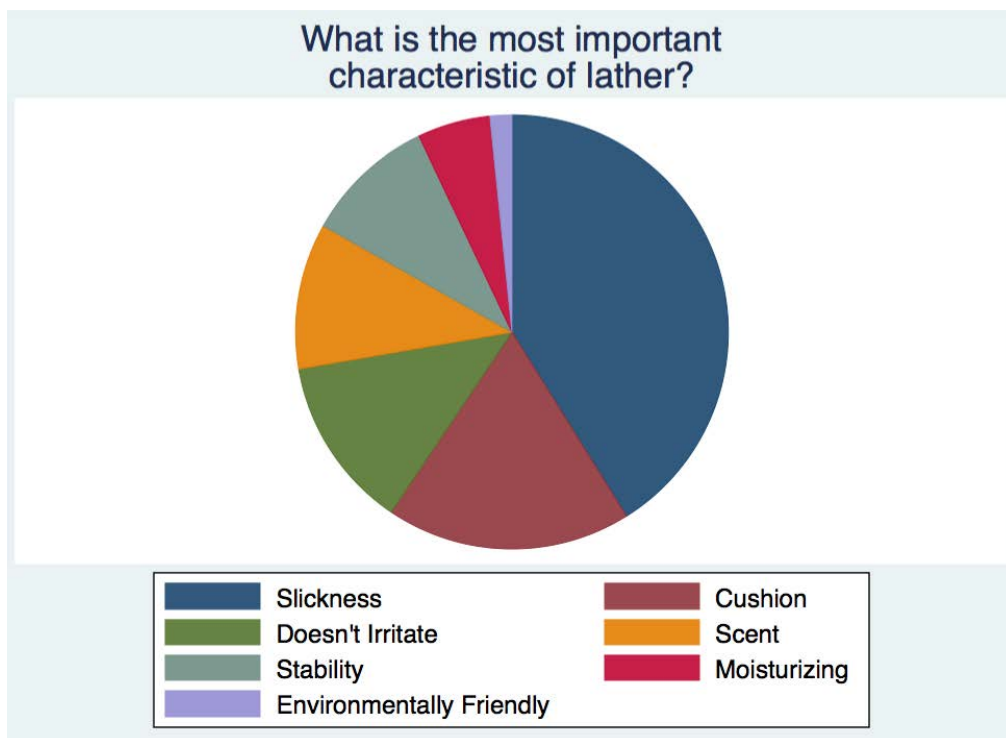


Figure 8.1.: The most important characteristic of a shaving lather.

Typically, respondents tend to use a small number of lathering products, but people seem willing to try more lathering products than purchase new brands of disposable blades.

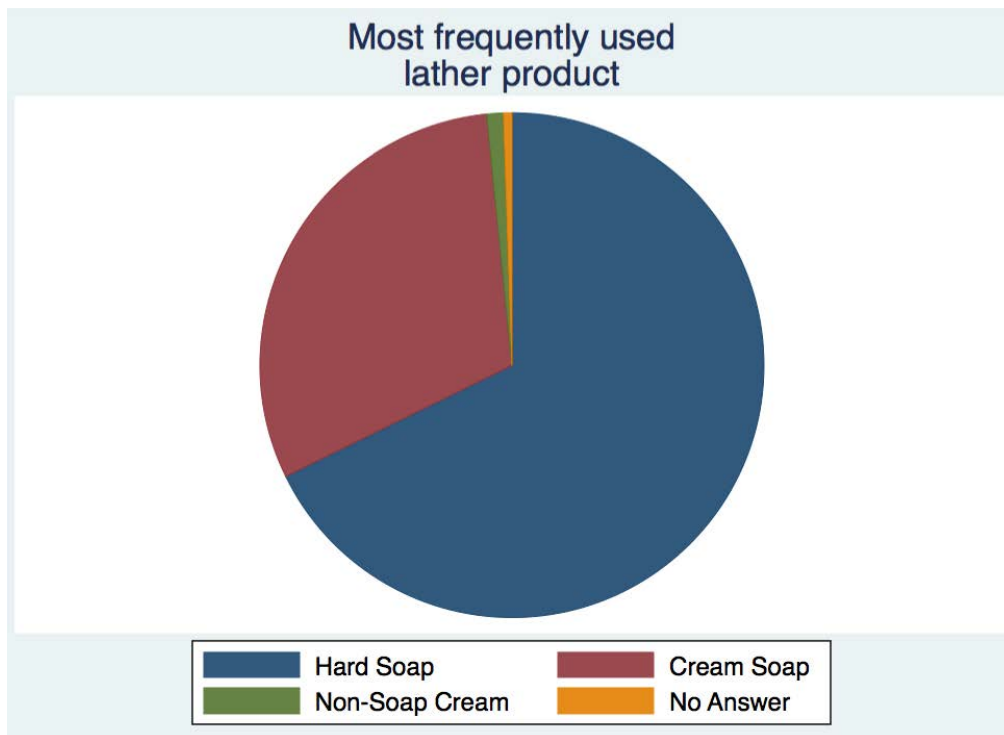


Figure 8.2.: Hard soaps are far and away the most popular lather product.

Lather Product Count	Percent of Respondents
1-5	39.8%
6-10	28.5%
11-20	18.2%
More than 20	13.0%
<i>No Answer</i>	< 1%



9. Collectors

Reminding us that wet shaving is also a *hobby*, many respondents indicate they collect shaving paraphernalia. Collectors make up about half of the respondents (almost exactly half collect straight razors!). Those who collect certain types of shaving gear or accessories are more likely to collect other, related items. Some collectibles are too specific to merit their own category (brand-specific collections, such as Old Spice items), and others are more likely to be collected based on the region of the respondent's home: for instance, North Americans are significantly more likely to collect brushes and safety razors ($p < 0.001$) than Europeans, and also significantly more likely to collect shaving militaria ($p < 0.01$).

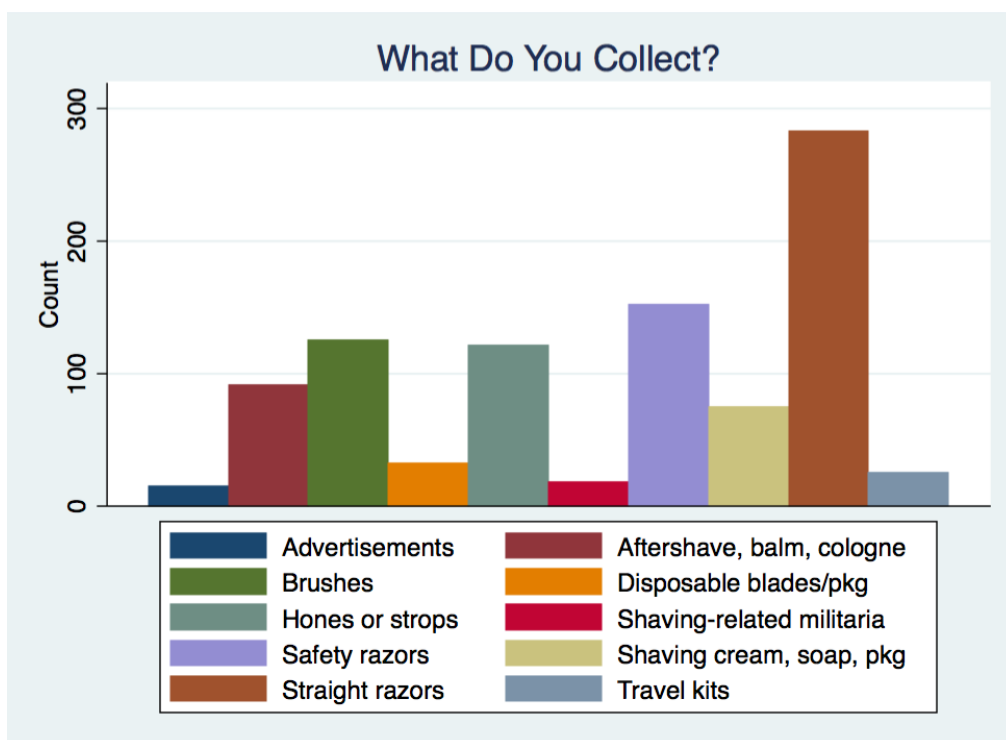


Figure 9.1.: Half of respondents collect straight razors, with safety razors being the next most popular collectible.

10. Spending Habits

When selecting items for purchase, few (3.4%) select primarily on lowest price (one assumes these individuals lack the ubiquitous “sensitive skin”). The largest group (54%) places primary emphasis on recommendations by friends or trusted sources.

Most Affects Your Decision to Purchase	Percent of Respondents
Recommended by sources I trust	54.0%
From a company I trust	12.5%
Scents I like	12.3%
Promises the closest shave	8.2%
Promises to be gentle to my skin	7.5%
Low price	3.4%
Nice packaging / “Shelf appeal”	0.4%
<i>No Answer</i>	1.8%

The global nature of internet commerce is reflected in the survey results, though the coverage is not as universal as in some forms of commerce. Some users may purchase from domestic vendors who handle international inventory as part of the business.

Have You Purchased Supplies Online?	Percent of Respondents
Yes	69.9%
No	26.7%
Unsure, but have shopped online	3.2%
<i>No Answer</i>	0.2%

Most people spend between 5 and 30 Euro per month; a significant number of people report spending zero, which seems unlikely unless they have bought enough consumables to last for a year or so. Most people who have bought a shave brush spent between 30 and 50 Euro on it. Some respondents report zero, which means that they either have no brush or were given the brush by a friend or relative.

11. Concluding Remarks

This survey reveals interesting information about the state of the wet shaving population in 2013. It cannot provide, as yet, information on trends in the wet shaving world, but in future years new surveys will allow time-series analyses. Repeated survey responses by individuals who have previously taken the survey will be *quite welcome* once the first revision of the survey is released in 2014, as tracking changes in the population of wet shaving is not and should not be limited to new survey respondents. Your changes through time are as relevant as the opinions of a new entrant into the resurgent world of wet shaving.

Such a large scale survey, created by research professionals, has not to our knowledge been undertaken to this point. All surveys, if those involved are honest, involve a leap of faith that the sample is representative *enough* to make statements about the global population of interest. Despite its oversights and present lack of time-series data, this project promises to be a useful barometer of the wet shaving world into the future.



Appendix

List of Figures

E1. Screenshot of survey form 3

2.1. Regional locations of respondents. 6

4.1. Respondents’ opinions of shave gear review content. 11

4.2. Social network graph of the online communities. 12

5.1. Respondents’ razor ownership, unranked by preference. 13

5.2. Respondents’ safety razor count. 15

6.1. Respondents’ reasons for not shaving with a straight razor. 19

8.1. The most important characteristic of a shaving lather. 21

8.2. Lather product type preferences 22

9.1. Graph of items collected by respondents. 23

A. Acknowledgements

The volunteers who assembled this report thank Lynn Abrams of [Straight Razor Place](#), Stefan Peter Wolf of [Nass Rasur](#), and ‘Rocketman’ of [The Original Safety Too](#) for encouraging users of their fora to participate in the survey. We also thank Laurent Planckaert and Bertrand Lecocq for their translation of the English survey into French.

Most of all, however, we would like to thank all wet shavers who participated in our survey, thus enabling us to prepare this report.



B. Survey Methodology

The *Straight Razor Magazine* 2013 wet shaving survey consists of up to 56 questions (some are conditionally offered based on previous responses). No individually identifiable information was collected or desired. The survey response count allows the estimation of numerical averages for the overall online wet shaving population with a confidence interval of $\pm 4.2\%$, with 95% confidence. The survey asks questions that are not nuanced such that translation into other languages would bias responses for one language population compared to another. The original survey is written in English. Alternate-language versions of the survey have been translated by native speakers of the respective languages. All means comparisons are simple Pearson's chi-squared (χ^2) tests, unless otherwise noted.

Once the responses are downloaded from Google Forms, a Python script sorts, corrects known spelling errors, and normalizes currency exchange rates to both current US Dollars and Euro from the native currencies of the respondents. A script reads the data into Stata, translates responses where necessary, produces statistical and graphic output. Some data are imported to R for additional graphics work. Finally, numerical results are written to L^AT_EX tables. Nearly all of the process is handled by approximately 2200 lines of code.

Colophon

This document was produced using the [L^AT_EX](#) document preparation system, with the [KOMA Script](#) package. The survey was conducted using [Google Forms](#). Data management, statistical analyses and graphics were implemented using [Python](#), [Stata version 13](#), and [R](#).