UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA PRESS

Chapter Title: The Rise of the Mass Market

Book Title: Hope in a Jar

Book Subtitle: The Making of America's Beauty Culture

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Published by: University of Pennsylvania Press

Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt3fhx5m.8

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The Rise of the Mass Market

Women's growing acceptance of beautifying blossomed into a mass market for cosmetics after World War I. From expensive skin creams to dime-store makeup, new goods tumbled into the marketplace. Between 1909 and 1929 the number of American perfume and cosmetics manufacturers nearly doubled, and the factory value of their products rose tenfold, from $14.2 million to nearly $141 million. In 1929, sociologist Robert Lynd estimated, Americans were spending $700 million annually for cosmetics and beauty services. In a very short time, cosmetics had become an affordable indulgence for American women across the socioeconomic spectrum.[1]

From the 1890s through the 1910s, a local, service-oriented beauty culture dominated by women had played the leading role in creating beauty consumers. During the same period, however, an emergent class of managers and professionals were developing new methods that would come to dominate American business. They devised a national system of mass production, distribution, marketing, and advertising that transformed local patterns of buying and selling and fostered a

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culture of consumption. By 1920, new cosmetics firms, led primarily by men, embraced these methods to create a mass market and sell beauty products to all women. But if the mass market overwhelmed the older tradition of women's beauty culture, it simultaneously required a new ensemble of businesswomen—advertisers, beauty experts, brokers, and tastemakers—to "cash in on women's sphere." The "business exploitation of femininity," as *Fortune* called it, intensified women's connection to beautifying, albeit in unexpected ways.[2]

Fundamental changes occurred in the beauty business during the early twentieth century. The miscellaneous wares manufactured by patent-cosmetics firms, perfumers, and local druggists increasingly lacked appeal to consumers. Jars of private-label cold cream and ballyhooed complexion remedies seemed old-fashioned and ineffective when compared to beauty culture, which offered women a comprehensive program of beautifying and encouraged their steady purchase of goods. Many earlier manufacturers did not anticipate the growing demand for cosmetics among all classes of women, and they stumbled trying to produce goods for national sale.

Perfumers, who saw themselves as skilled artists, especially disliked the prospect of selling to the masses. In 1909 they resisted opening the door of their trade association to companies making "tooth powders, massage creams and a series of goods that are advertised largely, with which we have little or no sympathy." At the same time, French firms offered sharp competition with high-quality powders and cosmetics superior to most American brands. Coty, Rigaud, and Bourjois hired New York agents after 1900 and then developed American subsidiaries that traded on the reputation of Paris for fashion and elegance. Richard Hudnut's was one of the few companies that successfully shifted from making high-priced perfumes to selling a mass-market brand. Most familiar American perfumeries of the nineteenth century simply disappeared.[3]

Meanwhile, growing pressure from consumers, reformers, and the

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government for safe products put patent cosmetic manufacturers on the defensive. The *Ladies' Home Journal* had long banished ads for patent remedies and toiletries from its pages. The 1906 Food and Drug Act excluded most cosmetics from government regulation, but prohibited cosmetic mislabeling, banned the use of such harmful ingredients as lead, and required proof of extravagant therapeutic claims. These regulatory measures pushed many marginal manufacturers to modify their formulas and rewrite their sales pitch, or go out of business.[4]

A few older companies joined with a new generation of entrepreneurs to build the modern cosmetics industry. They envisioned a mass market of beauty consumers, in which large-scale production, national distribution, and advertising would make cosmetics affordable and indispensable to all women. Pond's, for example, started out as a patent-remedy company in 1846, when Theron Pond invented an all-purpose antiseptic to heal nosebleeds, cure "women's complaints," and restore sunburned or diseased skin—a typical self-help elixir. After the Civil War, the company added soap and toiletries as a sideline to the sale of Pond's Extract. An advertising survey in 1891—an early instance of market research—identified a growing demand for skin-care preparations, and Pond's began to reposition itself as a beauty business. By 1914, the original Extract was no longer advertised. Jars of cold cream and vanishing cream became the pillars of the company.[5]

A handful of enterprising pharmacists turned private formulas dispensed locally into trademarked goods sold in the national market. Although such top sellers of the 1910s and 1920s as Hinds' Honey and Almond Cream and Ingram's Milkweed Cream have faded from view, others remain familiar brand names. Baltimore druggist George Bunting concocted a remedy to soothe sunburn and "knock eczema" in 1914; he sold Noxzema at Maryland's beaches for years before hiring a New York advertising firm to promote it nationally as an inexpensive cleansing and moisturizing cream. The largest cosmetics firms before World War II sold such basic creams and lotions, staple items found in most bathroom cabinets.[6]

The riskier business of selling rouge, lipstick, and other forms of

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makeup—products still controversial among consumers—attracted a motley group of small-time druggists, import agents, hair dealers, and venturesome entrepreneurs. By the 1920s, men with little cosmetic expertise saw easy money in selling beauty and hustled into the trade. Advertising pitchman Claude Hopkins founded a successful firm not by inventing new products—he hired a private manufacturer to make a generic skin-care line—but by convincing aging actress and "Eternal Flapper" Edna Wallace Hopper to lend her name to the brand.[7] Among the cosmetics entrepreneurs who developed the mass market, however, more typical were Carl Weeks and Max Factor, one now obscure, the other a household name.

Carl Weeks, born into a Midwestern homesteading family in 1876, worked in a pharmacy as a youth. He was a drugstore owner and unsuccessful manufacturer of patent medicines when he began to experiment with a formula for long-wearing face powder. In 1910 he successfully produced an adhesive mixture of dry cold cream and talc but had no idea how to promote the powder. For five years, he recalled, it "lay around the factory, gradually being used up by the girls." Eventually Midwestern druggists began to stock the product, and Weeks established the Armand Company in 1915. He promptly hired the prominent New York firm N. W. Ayer to develop a national advertising campaign. Ayer associated the Iowa-made powder with French elegance, packing it in a tiny hatbox that looked "as though it had just left the shop of a chic Parisian milliner." As Weeks put it, "the package was wrapped up in ideas." Weeks poured his own energies into developing and maintaining a secure distribution network among retail druggists, who comprised 95 percent of his business. A believer in personalizing dealer relations, he lavishly supplied free samples, designed window displays, and issued breezy newsletters full of pep talks and sales advice. From a $5,000 concern in 1912, Weeks parlayed face powder into a $2.5 million business by 1927. Within a few years, however, Depression-era price-cutting and women's changing taste, from heavy to sheer powders, led Armand into a steep, irreversible decline.[8]

In the same period, Max Factor transformed his theatrical makeup

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line into a mass-market brand. Factor, a Russian Jew born in 1877, had emigrated to the United States in 1904, not, his son observed, "the practically penniless immigrant," but already a successful wigmaker and cosmetician. After four years in St. Louis, he moved to Los Angeles in 1908 and quickly established a barbershop, wig business, and makeup studio. The movie industry had settled in southern California, and Factor's studio served both stage and screen performers. Although he sold traditional stage makeup, he invented a "flexible greasepaint" in 1914 for use in films, which could be applied thinly and looked more natural in movie lighting and close-up shots.[9]

From the beginning, Factor made a few nontheatrical cosmetics that he sold only in his shop—three shades of face powder and two shades of rouge little different from those of other manufacturers. Spurred by local demand, in 1920 he introduced Society Makeup, a cosmetic line for everyday use. But for the most part, Factor, an immigrant and craftsman devoted to the theatrical trade, left the actual development of the mass market to his Americanized children and a company specializing in new product promotions. They cultivated druggists along the Pacific coast, then expanded into Eastern and Midwestern cities, using the same techniques as Carl Weeks. As Factor's eldest son, Davis, explained, they would "go to the drug stores week after week, [would] keep the merchandise displayed on the counters, even trim their windows if they have to and . . . show the druggist how to sell cosmetics." It was not until 1927 that Max Factor achieved national distribution; a year later, Factor's first advertisements ran in mass-circulation movie and romance magazines.[10]

Born only a year apart, the face powder king of Iowa and makeup artist to Hollywood stars could hardly have been more different. Yet their biographies illuminate several key issues in the growth of the cosmetics mass market. In particular, they highlight the decisive turn of the cosmetics industry toward national advertising and media-based marketing in the 1920s.

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The various brands of powder, cream, and rouge were more alike than different, so far as their ingredients and formulas were concerned. If an advertiser focused only on cosmetics' intrinsic qualities, copywriter Dorothy Dignam observed, there were "few built-in copy appeals to attract women buyers." Of course there were inventions that distinguished certain brands: Factor's Pan-Cake foundation, a screen makeup modified for everyday use, was a highly praised innovation. Most manufacturers at this time, however, including Weeks and Factor, tinkered with stock formulas, making small alterations in the balance of ingredients, tints, and perfumes. Cold cream, for example, was the basis for specialized preparations containing a host of unusual ingredients—turtle oil, vitamins, hormones, even radium—to bleach, firm, or "nourish" the skin. (As critics of the cosmetics industry never tired of complaining, these additives were often bogus, sometimes hazardous, or in quantities too small to have any noticeable effect.)[11]

A look at the industry explains the similarities. Cosmetics production was still a relatively small-scale affair in the early decades of the twentieth century. Factories required a modest number of workers and used batch methods of production; nationwide, toiletries companies employed fewer than 9,000 workers in 1925. A routine practice in the cosmetics industry was the use of private-label manufacturers, who created standard products for a number of companies, which then packaged and sold them under their own brand names. Department stores and mail-order operations had long used this arrangement for "house brand" skin-care preparations. The growing popularity of cosmetics, especially makeup, led many start-up companies to contract with private-label firms. Manufacturing rouge, lipstick, and mascara required special equipment and expertise, and only the largest companies made them in their own plants. A few private-label manufacturers successfully went into brand-name marketing themselves; two of the most popular cosmetics of the 1920s and early 1930s, Tre-Jur compacts and Outdoor Girl powder, originated in this way. Most private-label houses, however, served the cosmetics industry behind the scenes, an arrangement that ensured the similar composition of many preparations.[12]

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Packaging face cream in a Chicago factory in the 1920s.

At the same time, cosmetics firms flooded the market with products packaged to appear new and different. By 1930 women could choose from a bewildering array of three thousand face powders and several hundred rouges. A handful of leading brands controlled about 40 percent of cosmetics sales, which left much room for hundreds of companies to jockey for a share of sales. In this volatile trade, most of the entrepreneurs who developed the top makeup brands of the 1920s (in contrast to skin-care products) had only a short burst of success. In addition to Max Factor, the only pre–World War II American companies producing makeup that grew into large, long-lived corporations were Maybelline and Revlon, founded in 1914 and 1932 respectively. Significantly, both had started out as specialty firms that honed in on a niche of the market—Maybelline producing mascara, Revlon nail polish—and their explosive growth as general cosmetics firms occurred only after 1945.[13]

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With so many products on the market, companies competed fiercely for shelf space in stores. Unlike the early women beauty culturists, mass-market manufacturers—mainly men—moved comfortably within the regular system of wholesale and retail distribution. That system was changing, however, as new drug syndicates, five-and-tens, and chain stores challenged independent pharmacies and department stores. Retailers embraced the new merchandising techniques at the point of purchase. "The toilet goods counter and all that it can be made to suggest is, to thousands of women, the very nearest they can ever come to romance," stated one promoter. "The qualities of change and excitement to be found there will do more to induce a buying urge than any intrinsic value of the goods themselves." Cosmetics companies courted retailers with an array of "dealer helps," from window trims and counter cards to display trays and free samples. For O. N. Falk & Son, a small-town Wisconsin druggist, the trickle of such offers from cosmetics firms turned into a flood by the 1920s.[14]

But retailers were not simply conduits for manufacturers' goods. Independent shopkeepers demanded special deals on merchandise; chain stores promoted their own "house" lines; and both cut manufacturers' suggested prices. Weeks and Factor's sons were typical of cosmetics manufacturers who made tremendous efforts in dealer relations. For them, consumer culture was less a world of glamour and fantasy than a protracted and prosaic skirmish over gaining sales outlets, differentiating products, pushing stock, and maintaining prices.

Their chief weapon in the war for profits became advertising. Modern advertising had developed in the late nineteenth century, serving manufacturers' efforts to increase consumer demand, gain leverage over retailers, and regularize production. Before the 1910s, however, national advertising played a small role in the sale of cosmetics. Perfumeries and patent cosmetics firms advertised their wares on trade cards, posters, sample envelopes, sheet music, and broadsides, but much of the trade was local and word of mouth. Magazine advertising was quite limited. A few firms sold creams and powders in women's magazines, but rarely did an ad for rouge or eye makeup appear. Un-

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like toilet soaps, presented in full-page, lavish designs in the 1880s and 1890s, most cosmetics ads were set in small type and remained in the back pages of magazines.[15]

By World War I, however, advertising agencies boldly began to proclaim, "Extensive Use of Cosmetics Due to Advertising." French exporters and large American manufacturers of skin-care products were among the first to develop major national ad campaigns. Smaller domestic firms, especially those selling makeup, followed after 1918, and beauty ads filled the popular media. Advertising expenditures in the thirty largest mass-circulation magazines mushroomed from $1.3 million in 1915 to $16 million fifteen years later. During the 1920s, toiletries placed third among all classes of goods advertised in magazines generally, second in women's magazines, and fifth in newspapers. In four popular women's magazines studied in 1929, about 20 percent of advertising space was devoted to cosmetics.[16]

When radio broadcasting began in the late 1920s, the cosmetics industry hastened to sponsor programs and purchase commercial spots. Between 1927 and 1930, the investment of cosmetics and toiletries firms in advertising on the radio networks climbed remarkably, from $300,000 to $3.2 million annually. The French company Bourjois successfully introduced a perfume called Evening in Paris on the radio, airing the music and sounds of Parisian nightlife. In 1931, Lady Esther became the first cosmetics firm to allot almost all its advertising budget to the airwaves; promoted as a Depression-era product cheaper than its competition, Lady Esther saw sales increase 400 percent within a year of its first broadcast.[17]

Ad placements in national magazines varied considerably in the 1920s and 1930s, and show a distinct but not rigid pattern of marketing to specific groups of consumers. Salon-based firms like Arden and Rubinstein publicized their exclusive lines in a handful of major women's magazines and more elite publications like *Town and Country* and *Vogue*. Many mass-market companies also ran ads in *Vogue*, less to address society women than to announce their serious intentions to the trade. Such large mass marketers as Pond's covered the wide field of

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women's magazines and general periodicals. In contrast, Maybelline placed ads promoting mascara, still a controversial type of makeup, in numerous movie and confession magazines, Sunday newspaper supplements, and specialized journals, such as *Theater.* Whatever strategy companies followed to position their products, advertising required a significant outlay. In only one month in 1926, Maybelline spent $4,000, Arden $20,775, and Pond's nearly $60,000 in major national magazines.[18]

Businesswomen were at a disadvantage in the new market for cosmetics, with its increased competition for consumers, commitment to costly national advertising, drug- and department-store distribution, and greater need for capital. "Production on a small scale is now practically prohibitive," Rubinstein observed, but this had been the way women had traditionally entered the business. Beauty culture's original strength—its localism and service orientation—proved a weakness in this changing climate. Although for many women a trip to the beauty parlor had become a weekly habit, the salon no longer provided the springboard into cosmetics manufacturing and sales. Women dominated the ranks of hairdressers and beauticians, to be sure, but skin treatments and makeup composed a declining percentage of beauty parlor profits. After World War I, the craze for hair bobbing and permanent waves, along with growing pressures for training and certification, made hair styling the central work of the beauty parlor. When consumers wanted cosmetics, they turned to department stores and drugstores, which were more likely to carry the nationally advertised brands of large manufacturers.[19]

The compass of women's activity and power in the cosmetics industry thus narrowed after 1920. The beauty culture tradition continued in the profitable "class" segment of the industry pioneered by Arden and Rubinstein, but few women managed to establish successful mass-market firms. Edna Murphey Albert expanded a door-to-door operation selling homemade deodorant into the Odorono Company. Princess Pat, one of the most successful makeup lines in the 1920s, was the brainchild of husband-and-wife team M. Martin Gordon and Frances Patri-

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cia Berry: He supervised the manufacturing process, while she managed promotion and sales, lecturing on cosmetics and eventually broadcasting as "Beauty Editor of the Air." Beauty culturist Madame Berthé, maker of Zip depilatory, allied with a larger manufacturer to enter the mass market.[20]

These women were more the exception than the rule. "Of the many firms once owned and operated by women," observed fashion writer Catharine Oglesby in 1935, "the great majority have passed over into the hands of large companies controlled by men who are directors in large holding companies." Dorothy Gray, who had established her New York salon in 1916, sold her high-priced skin-care line in 1926 to Lehn and Fink, an established drug supplier and manufacturer of such staple goods as Lysol disinfectant and Pebeco toothpaste. Marie Earle, Ruth Maurer of Marinello, Edna Albert, Peggy Sage, and Kathleen Mary Quinlan also sold their companies in the 1920s, although the latter two continued as stockholders and directors. Even Helena Rubinstein succumbed in 1928 to a large offer for her American manufacturing operation from Lehman Brothers, the investment firm. But when Lehman tried to turn the Rubinstein label—sold in specialty shops and department stores—into a cheap variety-store line, an enraged Madame Rubinstein protested. She pressured Lehman to return the company to her by writing women stockholders that men did not understand feminine beauty needs. After the stock market crash, she bought back enough stock—at a substantially reduced price—to regain control of the company.[21]

Elizabeth Arden retained continuous ownership of her company—alone among the leading white beauty culturists—but she recognized the sea change taking place. Turn-of-the-century beauty culture had emphasized a discipline of skin care that would supposedly lead to lasting beauty, but it was the growing emphasis on rouge, lipstick, and mascara that increasingly spurred the industry's development. The " 'temporary' beauty business," as Arden disdainfully called the trade in makeup, had won. "The great days of the salons are over," she sadly concluded in 1937.[22]

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The African-American beauty industry is usually perceived to have been segregated from these developments, and in many ways it was. Black-owned firms addressed black women almost exclusively, and they did so in African-American magazines and newspapers, not mass-circulation publications. Nor did African Americans appear in national magazines or advertising, except as demeaning stereotypes, such as Aunt Jemima, or as the butt of racist jokes. Nevertheless, as the cosmetics industry expanded the market among white women through national advertising and mass marketing, a parallel set of developments occurred in the African-American beauty trade. In many respects, black and white entrepreneurs followed similar paths in capitalizing upon the desire for beauty.

Even as women pioneered an African-American beauty culture, many black patent medicine makers, druggists, barbers, and peddlers entered the cosmetics trade. Working on a small scale, one pharmacist recalled, black entrepreneurs "usually made up enough goods to supply their customers and distributed the same from the ordinary hand bag." Relatively few in number, drugstores nevertheless developed more rapidly than other black-owned retail outlets, largely because they were patronized by African-American physicians. Like their white counterparts, some black pharmacists went into manufacturing hair tonics and skin creams for local patrons, then expanded into regional and national distribution. By the 1910s, the demand had grown so great that scores of would-be entrepreneurs—from porters to teachers—rushed to profit from the new opportunities. Although hair products remained dominant, skin creams, powder, and even makeup appeared on the market.[23]

Some black businessmen used beauty culture methods, developing their own hair systems, beauty schools, and correspondence courses. Others launched cosmetics businesses with a vision of consumer culture closer to that of the predominantly white mass market. Anthony Overton paved the way with High-Brown preparations. Born in Louisiana in 1864, the son of slaves, Overton earned a law degree in 1888, then worked variously as a judge, Pullman porter, peddler, and

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proprietor of an Oklahoma general store. In 1898, he founded the Overton-Hygienic Company to manufacture baking powder, then added preserves and extracts. Within a few years, he began to make High-Brown Face Powder, designed "to harmonize with the color and skin texture of the women of our race." With the discovery that women "used more face powder than baking powder," Overton's cosmetics business took off, especially in the South and Midwest. Overton was a "race man," hiring only black salesmen and office clerks. "Having abiding faith in our own people," he once said, "we have conducted our business strictly as a Negro enterprise." In the early 1900s, Overton used door-to-door agents to sell products, and he approached black colleges and other institutions to carry his goods. But Overton also aggressively sought mainstream channels of distribution. In 1911 he moved his manufacturing plant to Chicago, a hub for distribution and transportation, hired five full-time traveling salesmen, persuaded large jobbers to carry the High-Brown line, and gained access to variety stores and neighborhood drugstores. He also underwrote a magazine for black women called the *Half-Century,* published from 1916 to 1922, which carried full-page ads for Overton-Hygienic products. Overton's success, the head of the National Negro Business League observed, "made it easier for other toilet products to reach the retail trade through regular channels."[24]

Overton may have been the inspiration for a group of Chicago-based black investors, who formed the Kashmir Chemical Company and launched Nile Queen cosmetics in 1918. Among them was Claude Barnett, a pioneering publicist and journalist. A graduate of Tuskegee, Barnett had worked for mail-order magnate Richard Warren Sears and for the U.S. Post Office. Deeply committed to Booker T. Washington's vision of black economic development, he also appreciated modern methods of marketing. He set up his own advertising agency in 1916 and created a mail-order operation to sell portraits of well-known African Americans. In 1919 Barnett founded the Associated Negro Press, the first press service for black newspapers. He distributed ANP news releases in exchange for advertising space, which he sold to other

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advertisers or used to promote Nile Queen. The cosmetics ads were strikingly elegant and fashion conscious, reflecting Barnett's familiarity with commercial design and advertising appeals. In this way, Barnett simultaneously shaped public opinion and fostered a consumer culture among African Americans.[25]

With the tremendous growth of the African-American cosmetics market, white-owned companies eyed the field with greater interest. Increasingly aware of black purchasing power, some white druggists and chain-store managers displayed cosmetics specifically for African Americans and included the black community in store promotions, although these were often segregated. In Fort Gibson, Oklahoma, when a drugstore held a gala week of free entertainment, food, and product samples, "the negro population was not forgotten," reported *Colgate Shavings* in 1923: "More than $200 worth of prizes were given to the colored population at the same time, and twenty-five gallons of ice cream were delivered to negro churches."[26]

Some mass-market firms that had sold primarily to white consumers began to solicit black patronage. Boncilla Laboratories created a popular fad in the early 1920s with a clay cleansing mask; mainly advertising in mass-circulation romance and movie magazines, Boncilla also placed ads in the Pittsburgh *Courier*, a leading black newspaper. Such long-established companies as American Products, a mail-order firm, and J. E. McBrady, a wholesale supplier, also courted African Americans. In 1922 American Products included a High Brown tint in its Zanol line of face powders, "made especially for dark complexioned people, something entirely new in face powders and already in popular demand." As the Second City's black population grew around World War I, Chicago-based McBrady started a complete line of "Specialties for Brown Skin People," sold only through agents and advertised with appeals to race pride.[27]

Most important were the white start-up entrepreneurs who built huge businesses manufacturing hair and skin preparations especially for African Americans. In the mid-1920s a black political journal, the *Messenger*, concluded that "probably the largest number of manufactur-

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ers of such commodities are white men."[28] Relying heavily on newspaper advertising campaigns, they made such trade names as Golden Brown, Nadinola, and Golden Peacock familiar to black women.

McBrady's advertising card, circa 1915.

Plough Chemical Company was the most aggressive and successful of these. Sixteen-year-old Abe Plough started in the drug trade in 1908 in Memphis, a center for drug manufacturing in the South. Press histories of the company tell how Plough took a $125 loan from his father, peddled "healing oil" and blood tonics, and built one of the largest pharmaceutical houses in the United States. African Americans remembered the story differently. "Many Negroes like to think that the Plough fortune is founded upon the generous support which colored people gave to his early efforts," the Associated Negro Press reported sardonically in 1951. "Plough used to go about driving an old crippled white horse to a buggy, selling hair straightener, pomades, perfumes, etc."[29]

In 1914 Plough bought a drugstore on Beale Street, the commercial hub of black Memphis, where he promoted a bleach cream to African Americans. He sold his Black and White cosmetics line through drugstores, not agents, and priced it below the Walker and Poro brands. By World War I, Plough had become the largest advertiser in black newspapers, able to pressure publishers for free publicity and reduced rates on ads. Plough "made a fortune out of advertising in Negro newspapers," one black business leader recalled. In the 1920s Plough in-

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vested his profits from cosmetics in the drug trade, purchasing St. Joseph's Aspirin, and he began advertising Black and White beauty preparations to white women in national publications. These ads replaced the explicit racial message of the ads directed at black consumers with a general promise of light, clear skin, like other mass-market advertising. In a similar way, Plough "whitened" his company's public face, erasing its origins in the black cosmetics trade as it became a pharmaceutical giant.[30]

African-American cosmetics manufacturers tried to counter this competition by forming a trade association in 1917, which over the next decade discussed how to force "unscrupulous white concerns off the market." Cooperation proved difficult. Although the call for racial solidarity was an influential commercial strategy, the African-American press, precariously dependent on advertising revenue, resisted pressure to reject white-owned companies' dollars. To sidestep the problem, some white companies, like McBrady's and Golden Brown, simply masqueraded as "race businesses" to gain consumers' trust; as Walker's general manager F. B. Ransom warned, they were "operated by colored but actually financed by white capital." Moreover, black manufacturers could not compete with mass-market tactics: White businessmen like Plough gave drug and chain stores special deals, offered lower prices, and effectively undercut African-American firms.[31]

Black businesswomen made various attempts to adapt to the new conditions of marketing and selling. Because national mass-circulation magazines excluded African-American companies, Madam C. J. Walker and Annie Turnbo Malone purchased advertising in scores of black newspapers, farm journals, and religious periodicals to cobble together coverage coast to coast. Although both continued to rely on agent-operators, the Walker Company also sought drugstore distribution, even when Walker agents balked and demanded "proper protection" from retail competition. Adding to her complement of hairdressing products, Walker inaugurated a line of face powders and skin-care cosmetics in 1919, responding to "the demands of the times

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and the requests of our many agents"; Malone, the more conservative of the two women, followed suit in 1922. While hair grooming involved longstanding traditions upon which African-American beauty culture capitalized, the introduction of powder and paint indicated a turn toward a more modern sensibility.[32]

Walker held fast to her earliest commitments, however. She included in her cosmetics line a witch hazel jelly for the hands of "those who work in the open and women who put their hands in hot water." Even more significant was her refusal to manufacture skin bleach. After Walker's death in 1919, the company was run by general manager F. B. Ransom. Although he retained the agent-operator system, he came to depend increasingly on drugstore distribution, newspaper advertising, and complexion product sales. Most indicative of the changing tenor was the introduction of the skin bleach Tan-Off. Sales of the original hair grower declined sharply in the 1920s and early 1930s, while Tan-Off sold briskly, "our best seller in some sections," the *Walker News* reported.[33]

Poro suffered in 1927 when Annie Malone and her husband Aaron divorced and fought for control of the business. When a St. Louis court put Poro into receivership and a white man in charge, black public opinion rallied to the woman entrepreneur. "Madam Malone's fight becomes the Race's fight," said one newspaper. Annie Malone eventually won, but at great cost, with Poro in ruins. In 1929, according to Claude Barnett, Poro did only $475,000 in sales, while Plough, in contrast, sold $5 million in products to African Americans, about 40 percent of the company's total sales in cosmetics and drugs.[34]

The Great Depression sealed the fate of many black women's businesses. Hair work remained an important source of employment for black women, ranking sixth in nonagricultural jobs in 1930. National agent-operator systems did not disappear, as Sara Spencer Washington's success with Apex in the 1930s demonstrates. Beauty shops too endured as vibrant sources of economic, social, and even political strength in black communities. But the grand vision of beauty culture had been battered by the economic crisis, aggressive white competi-

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tors, and black businessmen who embraced mass-market advertising and sales strategies. As Barnett observed, organizations that mingled business and philanthropy could not compete with the single-minded pursuit of profit.[35]

The consumer culture that emerged in the 1920s, with its emphasis on advertising and media-based marketing, is today so integral to American life that it appears an inevitable, almost natural development. Cosmetics, consumption, and femininity seem part of a seamless fabric. In this formative period, however, mass-market firms actively searched for ways to package their goods that would legitimize cosmetic products and practices still questionable in the eyes of many Americans. Gaining insight into women consumers, and channeling their apparent needs and desires into sales, remained a perplexing problem for many of the men who now ran the cosmetics industry.

Compounding the difficulty was their self-consciousness as men in the business of feminine beauty. "We know each other as men and have learned to respect each other as men," toasted the Manufacturing Perfumers Association in 1907. Salesmen and drummers spoke a gung-ho, hail-fellow language that filled cosmetic trade journals. "The merchant who orders the full line is hitting on all four cylinders of the TRE-JUR Sales Engine," read a trade advertisement for women's powder compacts. Carl Weeks constantly appealed to masculine pride and camaraderie, exhorting salesmen and druggists not to be "yellow bellies" in the commercial arena. He hired clean-living salesmen—never women—and insisted they abstain from liquor, gambling, and smoking. Druggists responded enthusiastically: "Each letter, and each bit of advertising you send us, seems so 'chummy,' that it *never* goes into file X without being read."[36]

These businessmen were undoubtedly aware of and eager to erase the taint of effeminacy and homosexuality that marked men who beautified women. Although the history of gay men in beauty work remains to be written, we know that the image of the male hairdresser, who had

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Max Factor, Sr., with actress Alice White in a 1920s publicity photo. (Copyright Procter and Gamble)

served wealthy female clients in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, was often that of the dandy or fop. What may have been an acceptable personal relationship between male cosmetician and female client became more problematic when presented in mass media—in the movies, where censorship boards and studio guidelines tried to expunge images of gay men, and in advertising. The handful of male beauty experts in the mass market usually represented themselves as professional men of science or the stage. Max Factor, noted a newspaper article, "refus[ed] absolutely to wear the mannerisms of dandified beauty specialists." Photographs of Factor show him simultaneously as makeup artist, chemist, and father figure. Although short in height, he often appeared to be standing over compliant actresses who deferred to his know-how. Early publicity interviews with Factor presented him as a successful immigrant who spoke pidgin English with a Yiddish inflection: "Grease paint is not for street. Yong girl might use powder, a

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little—mebbe." By the 1930s, company publicists polished his image into that of an articulate lab-coated expert, even as, according to one source, they urged the real Factor not to speak in public. When he died, his son Frank took his name, so that authoritative advice could continue to come from Max Factor.[37]

Factor was an exception. The challenge of selling an intimate, feminine item to women more commonly led cosmetics firms to simulate a female world of beautifying. Carl Weeks often wrote Armand promotional leaflets that druggists distributed with samples or mailed to their best customers. Weeks would visualize women before composing the copy. He thought of himself sitting in "a dimly lit room" with "silken drapes," and, he reported, "got one of the sweet sisters in my mind's eye and wrote [a] letter to her." Sometimes he wrote *as* a woman, in the first-person, telling a tale of how switching to Armand brought romance and happiness. One draft, however, drew groans from many women on his staff, playing as it did on the stereotype that women would do anything to catch a man. Although some found it "catchy" and "modern," others attacked the idea as "so trite—so overworked in advertising." Calling it "hooey," one secretary asserted, "If I got this in the mail I'd put it in the waste paper basket along with 'True Stories.' " Weeks knew how to speak to his fellow salesmen but stumbled when he addressed women consumers.[38]

Cosmetics companies frequently hired or created female beauty experts identified with the brand. Although this practice was common in the marketing of consumer goods—exemplified by the fictive Betty Crocker—the genuine tradition of female leadership in beauty culture lent authority to mass-market cosmetics companies. Many brands had their version of Madam Jeannette, "Specialiste en Beauté" for Pompeian preparations, or Jeanne Armand, who signed replies to consumers' inquiries. Radio multiplied the presence of such mass-market experts, whose beauty talks, sponsored by cosmetics firms, spread "the methods in beauty science which up to this time have been largely limited to the rich women." "Lady Esther Serenade," for instance, featured musical numbers interspersed with advice from Lady Esther

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herself—or rather a radio actor playing the beauty adviser. The "sugary band and a woman with a sickening voice," advertising pioneer Helen Woodward ruefully observed, was "radio's best example of success."[39]

Some firms simply fabricated a complete illusion of the woman-owned business. Around 1920, a group of Lowell investors with no experience in the beauty trade hired Woodward to develop a cosmetics company called Primrose House. Although manufacturing a complete cosmetics line for the mass market was prohibitively expensive, she determined that a salon-based skin-treatment line could be started for much less, about $60,000. Woodward hired a private-label manufacturer to make fifty standard products, wrote ad copy publicizing them as the beauty secrets of a woman diplomat, and created an exclusive salon featuring trained nurses to give facial massages. Finally Woodward engaged Mrs. Gouverneur Morris as a beauty specialist, capitalizing not on her cosmetics expertise—she had none—but on her prominent name in high society. "All this was done before a single ounce of cold cream was manufactured," Woodward recalled. The company started out well, but conflicts between the male investors and women managers soon erupted. According to Woodward, the men failed to appreciate how costly an aura of feminine exclusivity could be. They ousted the women and placed the company under new management in 1926, but preserved the ambience of women's beauty culture and remained active into the 1930s.[40]

The white male owners of the Golden Brown Beauty Company went even further, performing not only in drag but in blackface. Hessig-Ellis, a wholesale drug company in Memphis, registered the Golden Brown trade name and set up a "dummy" organization that employed thirty-five black workers and sold only to black consumers. Advertisements celebrated Madam Mamie Hightower, supposedly the company's founder and leader. One ad sketched Hightower's "meteoric rise" from a "mere nobody" to owner of a Beale Street salon, and finally to "beauty culturist of international repute" and "Race Benefactress." The Hightower story was an elaborate invention, probably produced by

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Hessig-Ellis's white advertising manager, Harold Gilbert, who also served as Golden Brown's vice president. Mamie was, in fact, the obscure wife of Zack Hightower, a porter for Hessig-Ellis; she may have been a home-based "hair presser" but never owned a beauty parlor in Memphis. The ruse seems to have worked. Although Claude Barnett and others knew the truth, black newspapers publicly lauded Hightower, urging that her "good work go steadily on." Indeed, when a report surfaced in 1929 that Golden Brown was sending racist advertising circulars to white druggists containing references to superstitious "darkies," the *New York Age* expressed puzzlement, concluding that Hightower's company had been taken over by whites.[41]

Ironically, even as women were displaced from ownership of cosmetics firms, manufacturers and advertisers increasingly turned to them for their leadership and knowledge of beauty matters. This was a striking development, since women had little authority—except as consumers—in the mass market at large. In advertising agencies, women made up only a small percentage of professional staff. The magazines and newspapers that circulated the images and ideals of consumer culture were owned and published by men; on the mastheads of the major women's magazines, male editors outnumbered women two to one. In the beauty industry, by contrast, there were significant numbers of professional women working in advertising, marketing, sales, and media. Mainly white, middle-class, and college-educated, they filled a particular role as tastemakers and cultural brokers of the new mass cosmetics industry, mediating between male manufacturers and women consumers.[42]

According to copywriter Dorothy Dignam, men wrote the earliest ads for toiletries but "when face powder began to come out in shades and creams could 'beautify overnight' and perfumes were all moonlight-and-roses men got fed up and women began to compose the selling prose." Women were disproportionately assigned beauty accounts in advertising agencies. Such pathbreakers as Helen Woodward, Helen Landsdowne Resor, Edith Lewis, and Dignam, among others, developed major national campaigns, while many others worked on beauty

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advertising in local agencies, department stores, cosmetics firms, and mail-order houses.[43]

At the J. Walter Thompson Company, which specialized in advertising to female consumers, women wrote all the copy for the firm's beauty accounts. Helen Landsdowne, one of the first women in advertising, became a guiding figure there. She briefly worked for a Cincinnati toilet-goods manufacturer, but quickly moved on to advertising in the early 1900s. Stanley Resor, later the head of J. Walter Thompson, hired her as a copywriter; they transferred together to New York in 1911 and married in 1917. An ardent feminist—said to have led a Thompson contingent in New York's mass suffrage parades—Helen Landsdowne Resor brought many professional women into the company. Believing that women would advance further in a single-sex environment, she created separate editorial departments for women and men. "The women were terrifically powerful," one executive confirmed.[44]

Most were college graduates who had worked in business, as publicists, writers, merchandisers, product testers, or market researchers. Others were active in social reform and the suffrage movement, including several publicists newly jobless after women won the right to vote. Ruth Waldo had worked for the Russell Sage Foundation and the Charity Organization Society before joining the firm in 1915. "When Waldo went back to tell the Social Work people, they were scandalized," recalled one of her coworkers. "You see, they thought it was fine to be helping people, but not to work to make money." She added: "Miss Waldo felt a bit that way herself."[45]

This first generation of advertising women advanced, with some ambivalence, a "woman's viewpoint" in consumer culture, an outlook more influential in the marketing of cosmetics and toiletries than in that of any other consumer products except food and fashion. As a more self-conscious notion of the woman consumer took hold, it became axiomatic among mass-market manufacturers and advertisers that "if you are selling to women, nothing succeeds like a woman's viewpoint." Advertising appeals "must be made with knowledge of the habits of women, their methods of reasoning, and their prejudices,"

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commented Resor. On cosmetics, food, and fashion accounts, Thompson copywriter Frances Maule explained, "a woman naturally falls into the vocabulary—those little phrases and intimate ways of talking that strike a housewife as ringing true." Women "have a tradition and specialized association from which men are completely cut off," Aminta Casseres agreed.[46]

The contradictions of the woman's viewpoint were apparent to the professionals who espoused it. It repackaged age-old stereotypes about women as impulsive and emotional, driven by "inarticulate longings" and easily swayed by flowery French phrases, snobbery, and romantic imagery. And it implied that women secured their jobs and succeeded in advertising, not through professional training and achievement, but by virtue of their womanly empathy. Some chafed at a sales pitch based on sex differences, but many, eager to take advantage of new job opportunities, invoked their special female insight into consumer motivation. Occasionally they would reveal that their womanly empathy was more tactical than natural, as when Dorothy Dignam caricatured her method of composing beauty advertisements: "If it's face powder, I pretend I'm covered with dreadful freckles, and I've just found the only thing in the world that will hide 'em from the cruel world. And then I write my copy about the cosmetics." News stories about Dignam often called her "girlish" but documented her shrewdness and professionalism.[47]

Adopting this approach to selling advanced the professional standing of white women throughout the cosmetics industry. They staffed cosmetics firms, department store merchandising offices, and the women's departments of daily newspapers. They became beauty editors, "service personalities," market researchers, publicity directors, and freelance writers specializing in beauty. Circulating from one post to another, they amplified the promotional efforts of the new mass-market commerce in beauty products and strengthened its institutional base.[48] Such niches of professional employment and influence within the new consumer economy were nonexistent for African Americans. Although black women wrote beauty columns, edited the occasional women's magazine, and appeared as company mouthpieces, their work

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in the beauty business remained segregated from and invisible in the mass market. For a tier of white professional and business women, however, mass-market cosmetics opened new opportunities.

In search of an effective way to address women, advertisers turned to beauty culture for a usable commercial language. Treatment lines, complexion analysis, beauty systems, demonstrations, empathy: These central elements of beauty culture were readily transferred to the mass market. Ad agencies, based in New York and other cities, particularly understood the vitality of salon-based beauty culture and its appeal to women throughout the country. Millions of women had no access to beauty parlors for skin care and could not afford the high-priced preparations of Elizabeth Arden or Dorothy Gray, but were familiar with the principles of beauty culture from the women's pages or from friends. Advertisers capitalized upon this interest, touting the democratization of beauty. "From advertising," N. W. Ayer proudly proclaimed, all women everywhere "are learning the secrets of great beauty specialists." Although advertisers increasingly favored images over words, cosmetics ads were often filled with text: Market researchers found that "women will read as many as 900 words of small, closely set type *straight through,* if it is about beauty."[49]

Helen Landsdowne Resor borrowed beauty culture techniques to transform the mundane use of Pond's cold cream into a daily beauty ritual. As early as 1906, the company's long-time ad agency, J. Walter Thompson, had associated Pond's Extract Soap with beauty specialist Grace Truman-Hoyt, headlining the "New Beauty Culture" in advertisements. Resor, however, conceived of Pond's staple cold cream and vanishing cream as a "system," and in 1916 began an ad campaign that featured the two products together as a single beauty treatment for all women. "Every normal skin needs two creams," ads proclaimed, cold cream to cleanse the face in the evening, vanishing cream to protect the skin and provide a base for face powder during the day. Vanishing cream was relatively new to the market, and the ads gave detailed instructions and urged women to adopt both products. Sales of the creams tripled between 1916 and 1920: Beauty culture had be-

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come the springboard for Pond's rebirth as a mass-market cosmetics company.[50]

Woodbury's complexion soap underwent a similar metamorphosis. It had been developed in the 1880s as a cure for skin diseases and advertised "on a very cheap patent medicine basis, featuring symptoms of the worst kind and illustrations of neckless heads." After 1915, the Thompson agency redefined Woodbury's as a beauty aid for all women, with ads promising "a skin you love to touch"—the famous and, for the time, slightly racy slogan written by Resor. Again, copywriters promoted beauty culture methods to sell a mass-market product. Calling it the "Woodbury Treatment," ads explained how to cleanse the skin with Woodbury soap and hot water, massage the face, then close the pores with cold water or ice, all skin-care techniques long used by beauty culturists. Adapting the demonstrator's running commentary on skin problems and cures, other ads targeted a series of disorders such as "conspicuous nose pores," solving each one with the Woodbury treatment. The campaign transformed an unpleasantly stinging soap into a wildly popular beauty aid.[51]

The power of cosmetics advertising derived not only from the potent imagery, evocative language, and personal appeals of the ads themselves, but from the ways they circulated among American women. The turn to national advertising in the 1920s fostered increasingly dense ties among cosmetics manufacturers, advertisers, retailers, periodicals, and mass media—"synergies," in the parlance of today's corporate leaders. While manufacturers, merchants, and magazines had been cooperating to promote consumption since the 1890s, their systematic collaboration to sell cosmetics was new. It multiplied the impact of cosmetics advertising, further legitimating women's pursuit of beauty and binding that pursuit to the purchase of goods.

The "big six" women's magazines—*Ladies' Home Journal, McCall's, Delineator, Woman's Home Companion, Pictorial Review,* and *Good Housekeeping*—appeared on the scene between 1885 and 1910,

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before the flowering of the mass-market cosmetics industry. Starting as dress-pattern and farm publications, they gradually became all-purpose journals for middle-class women. Their editorials, fiction, and a parade of fashions and household comforts deliberately enticed readers into the new consumer economy of brand-name, mass-produced goods. By 1900, magazine layout itself reinforced the consumerist message. Editors broke up the text of stories and articles, forcing readers to turn to the back pages where most of the advertising was placed, and they began to coordinate advertising and editorial material, placing food ads next to cooking columns, for example.[52]

At first women's magazines saw little potential revenue from cosmetics firms and did not apply these techniques to cosmetics promotion. When the *Delineator* polled its readers in 1904 about the brands they purchased to guide its choice of advertisers, the survey listed only face powder, soap, complexion cream, perfume, and dentifrice in the toiletries category. Despite readers' frequent queries about beauty, women's magazines remained reluctant advisers. Their concern with respectability and purity—in women and in goods—heightened their suspicion of cosmetics. "We fought shy of any beauty page for a long time," explained the editor of the *Ladies' Home Journal.* "Almost every one who writes the beauty page has an axe to grind." The magazine devoted less than one percent of each issue to beauty in the 1920s, and home journals oriented to small-town and rural housewives, such as *Modern Priscilla,* still less. Even as they ran more and more cosmetics ads, such women's magazines continued to issue paeans to inner, natural beauty.[53]

In their shadow, however, newspapers and cheap magazines offered outlets for beauty news. Women's pages, tabloids, and Sunday magazine inserts covered beauty extensively for urban readers, and syndicates like King Features made beauty columns available throughout the country by the early 1920s. In a 1929 survey of women's pages in small-city newspapers, 60 percent featured at least some beauty articles, most of them syndicated features. Movie and romance magazines, aimed especially at working-class and young women, regularly included articles

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on beauty and contained ads for mass-market and mail-order cosmetics. *Motion Picture* introduced a beauty hints column in 1916 at the same time that cosmetics ads began to feature screen stars. Such pulp magazines as *Beauty* and *Beautiful Womanhood* (from the publisher of *True Story,* Bernarr Macfadden) also appeared on newsstands.[54]

As cosmetics became a leading source of advertising revenue, the major women's magazines increasingly bound beauty to the marketplace. Regular beauty columns were standard fare by the 1930s, and editors eagerly extended "editorial cooperation" to the largest cosmetics firms. Wooing potential advertisers, the *Woman's Home Companion* claimed it "presold" cosmetics in editorial pages that "discuss products, stimulate wants, [and] prepare the market for brand-selling." Another magazine similarly touted its short stories and articles for their subliminal messages about toiletries. "The fascination of subtle perfumes," it declared, "is a frequent lure of the heroine of fiction." Magazine editors placed cosmetics ads next to relevant beauty articles, did "special work with local dealers," and offered, as Helen Woodward put it, "large gobs of free editorial space." Woodward, for her part, explained how trading on the niceties of women's etiquette softened the hard edges of business competition. She gained free publicity from women's magazines by taking the beauty editor to lunch and sending her free goods, which usually guaranteed a favorable notice. "We always dealt directly with her and spoke as though we weren't advertisers at all," Woodward remarked.[55]

The line between dispensing general beauty advice and hawking specific products blurred more and more. Advertisers mimicked the design and substance of magazine beauty features, clouding the reader's ability to distinguish between advertising and editorial content. J. Walter Thompson copywriters called it the "beauty editorial style," featuring a "light and intimate tone" with exhaustive facts and details. Marinello ads imitated confession-magazine fiction, with stories of heroines who win back straying boyfriends by a timely trip to the beauty salon.[56]

Initially beauty editors refrained from puffing brands in their

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columns and instead mailed leaflets with product information, prepared by the magazines, to readers upon request. These proved extremely popular: *Ladies' Home Journal* beauty editor Louise Paine Benjamin reported that a single beauty column in 1936 generated 40,000 letters asking for leaflets. By this time, however, the scruples of other editors had begun to disappear. Bernice Peck's column in *Mademoiselle*, a magazine oriented to college and young career women, frankly touted cosmetics by name. Some beauty editors and writers appeared in magazine ads, broadcast radio shows, and sold the use of their names to companies. When syndicated beauty columnist Antoinette Donnelly agreed to put her name on a cold cream soap, the trade press applauded, noting that consumers "have acquired a confidence in her judgment through years of familiarity with her writings." Although beauty writer Nell Vinick claimed her show on Gimbel's radio station offered talks "of a non-commercial nature, the stress being laid on the idea of service," her appearance advertised the New York store's cosmetics department.[57]

Magazines and advertisers also collaborated on early market research. When J. Walter Thompson conducted an investigation of the toiletries market for Pond's in 1923, *McCall's* Service Department mailed eighteen hundred questionnaires to women readers, and Hazel Rawson Cades, beauty editor of the *Woman's Home Companion*, opened her readers' mail to the ad agency. *Harper's Bazaar* introduced a Debutante Department in 1928 to gain market information for advertisers; it surveyed three thousand well-to-do young women, rewarding each with a grab bag of cosmetic gifts. Similarly, in the mid-thirties, the *Delineator*'s Beauty Institute called upon eight hundred readers to be "beauty consultants" for product development and marketing purposes.[58]

Many cosmetics firms combined national advertising with elaborate point-of-purchase promotions. The "tie-in," as it was called, was to the mass-market cosmetics industry what "system" had been to beauty culture: It spurred consumer demand by coordinating the efforts of manufacturers, advertisers, and retailers—parties who had distinct interests but remained mutually dependent. Cosmetic tie-ins usually ex-

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In one of the earliest advertising campaigns featuring movie stars, Mary Pickford promoted Pompeian beauty preparations.

ploited popular fads and fancies, from the suntanning craze to the 1922 discovery of Tutankhamen's tomb. "Everything Egyptian is now getting a billion dollars' worth of publicity," bragged the LeBlume Import Company, touting its Ramses line of powders and perfumes. The most successful tie-ins involved the stage and screen, which had already done much to popularize the look of makeup. Motion picture press books suggested that local exhibitors and retailers could link movies and toiletries by holding beauty contests, divulging the heroine's beauty secrets, placing movie stills in drugstores, and making up manikins to look like actresses. Edna Wallace Hopper even demonstrated her line in matinees "for women only," in which the "entire intimate performance [was] exquisitely shown in a boudoir bath."[59]

Max Factor—makeup artist to the stars—particularly exploited the movie tie-in. All advertisements prominently featured screen stars, their testimonials secured in an arrangement with the major studios that required them to endorse Max Factor. The company apparently did not seek personal appearances from actresses, who, Davis Factor complained, were often late, temperamental, and "always caused us lots of grief." Instead, company representatives draped the glamorous image of the movies around their products. At movie matinees, they set up stands in theater lobbies, made up women onstage, raffled cosmetic kits, and distributed complexion analysis cards with the names of local drugstores. On one occasion, Factor

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Still from the 1924 movie Men, *used in drugstore tie-ins.*

sponsored a gala on the Venice (California) pier, with cosmetic giveaways, makeup contests, and special consultation booths, all advertised with "big cards over the whole town and streamers on loads of the Pacific Electric cars."[60]

Product demonstrations, long used within beauty culture, were embraced by mass marketers, not only to sell specific brands but to acclimate women to systematic cosmetics use. In department stores, demonstrators set up tables piled with merchandise, applied creams and lotions to their own faces, and kept up a steady patter of instructions and promises. Often demonstrators chose a likely mark from the crowd. At a 1921 beauty show in Atlantic City, Aubrey Sisters representatives "selected middle-aged or elderly women with fairly smooth, unwrinkled faces, but poor complexions; made them up with creams, 'Beautifier' and rouge and really quite transformed them."[61]

As Helena Rubinstein and Elizabeth Arden expanded from salon services to product sales, they converted the demonstrator into a sales

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The demonstration as seen by a New York World *cartoonist. From* Toilet Requisites, *1928.*

Opposite*: This flapper promoted a powder compact in a shoe buckle, for use at dance halls and nightclubs. From* Toilet Requisites, *1927.*

representative who toured exclusive shops and department stores throughout the country, demonstrating cosmetics, training saleswomen, and generating publicity. Carl Weeks complimented Arden's representatives for "educating women to using a complete line of merchandise." Mass-market manufacturers and drug syndicates soon adopted the method. As early as 1917, the United Drug Company, which distributed Rexall products, dispatched demonstrators to small-town drugstores. For twenty-five dollars a week, "the well trained Beauty Specialist does more than merely stay in the store and wait on people," the firm announced; "she gives demonstrations and free facial massages by appointments in the home."[62]

By the early twenties, department stores and drugstores regularly sponsored "beauty marts" and "beauty weeks" filled with lectures, makeup sessions, and free samples. The arrival of New York cosmetics

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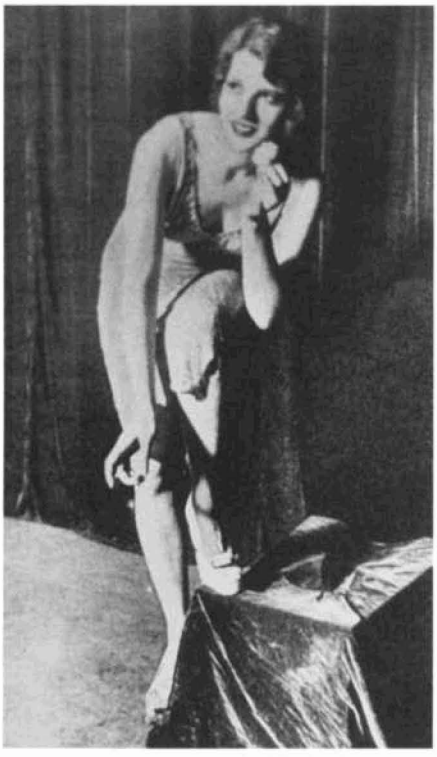

experts was a heralded event. The Owl drugstore in Los Angeles in 1922 featured fifty manufacturers' booths, a perfume fountain, and a stage where movie stars and fashion models appeared. "One of the big front windows was devoted to the art of 'Making Up,' a live model going through the process," commented a journalist, "and this proved to be such an attraction that demonstrations could only be held for fifteen-minute periods. The Police Department placed a detail of three men in front of the store; and yet at times it was impossible to get by."[63]

In addition to tie-ins with advertisers and retailers, cosmetics firms joined with garment manufacturers, merchandising stylists, and women's magazines to rationalize the fashion trades and, as one promoter put it, "reduce the element of speculation in style merchandising." Style bureaus, fashion merchandising clinics, and associations like the "Breath of the Avenue" and the Fashion Group reported on trends in art, color, design, and popular culture. Cosmetology educator Florence Wall advocated "co-operative promotion by beauty culturists with milliners, fashion designers, and textile manufacturers."[64]

Package design exemplified the turn to a fashion appeal. Before the 1910s manufacturers had used stock jars, plain pasteboard cartons, and standard labels made by printers or box makers. Competition from Paris, where artistic package design flourished, spurred American manufacturers like Weeks to consult art museums and hire artists to

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create distinctive boxes and bottles. Abandoning beauty culture's plain containers for striking colors and modernist motifs, Marinello packed a beauty cream in a translucent pink set-back skyscraper. The most important innovation in cosmetics packaging was portability, which turned powder compacts and lipstick cartridges into fashion accessories. Designed to be flourished in public, compacts flashed silver and enamel finishes, imitated golf balls and cigarette cases, and were even turned into belt and shoe buckles.[65]

"No two things are more closely allied" than a woman's "fashions and her cosmetics," stated *Vogue*'s beauty editor, but this was a strategic alliance, not an eternal truth. In the nineteenth century, beauty culture had touted timeless principles of enhancing appearance, and makeup was fashion mainly to the fast social elite and daring working-class women. In the 1920s and 1930s, manufacturers and consumers alike increasingly perceived the face as a style, subject to fashion trends and fads. In recognition of this development, the leading cosmetics trade journal changed its name in 1937 from *Toilet Requisites* to *Beauty Fashion.*[66]

Tying complexion to ever-changing fashion offered companies a powerful rationale for introducing new products. Although some skin-care companies resisted the call, many manufacturers jumped on the style bandwagon. In 1929 Carl Weeks introduced Symphonie face powder in one translucent shade, and touted its suitability for all (white) women's complexions. Although such a product offered little basis for a fashion appeal, that was precisely the tack Weeks took. That year the *Ladies' Home Journal* grandly proclaimed the "return to feminine charm," as a fluid and elegant silhouette deposed the boyish flapper look. To manufacturers, the *Journal* promoted this "Charm Decade" as a rich merchandising and advertising opportunity. Buying into the *Journal*'s fanfare, Weeks tied Symphonie to the new style with the theme, "New Clothes by Paris—New Complexion by Armand." When the fashion-based advertising, developed by Dorothy Dignam, was shown to Armand salesmen, "the boys were literally stunned"; industry commentators called it a "radical departure from ordinary merchandising policies."[67]

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Although Weeks adopted a big advertising campaign, the fashion appeal, and the tie-in—all central to the new promotion of manufactured beauty—Symphonie was a striking failure. Dealers and customers were confused by the advertising, their eyes captivated more by the stylish clothes and attractive models than by the product itself. "We are not selling fashions," Weeks complained about the dominance of the image in the ad. "We are introducing a new idea—the copy is what tells women about it." Meanwhile, women who tried Symphonie disliked the powder's heaviness and rejected Weeks's assurances that a single shade fitted all skins. Symphonie demonstrated, to Weeks's despair, that modern marketing methods could not overcome the product's limitations.[68]

Armand advertisement, 1930.

Weeks's experience was hardly unique. In those years, the cosmetics industry was highly volatile, with companies rapidly rising and declining, new products appearing and disappearing. The industry had staked its fortunes on modern advertising and marketing methods, as did many consumer-goods businesses in the 1920s and 1930s, but as Weeks learned, success was by no means certain. The industry acknowledged as much through an unusual commercial practice known as the "hidden" or "closed" demonstrator. Hired and trained by a cosmetics firm, the hidden demonstrator masqueraded as a regular saleswoman but actually induced customers

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to buy her employer's products. A related practice was known as "push money" or "p.m.'s," in which saleswomen employed by the store received a commission from the manufacturer for pushing its line. Such saleswomen were often paid openly on the job, but in cases where the retailer objected, they were paid "confidential" or "secret push money" at their homes. The premium amounted to as much as 10 percent of the sale.[69]

The use of hidden demonstrators was a widespread phenomenon peculiar to the cosmetics business among American consumer-goods industries. According to a 1923 study, several dozen toilet-goods manufacturers used hidden demonstrators or push money. Although cosmetics firms argued that hidden demonstrators relieved stores of significant labor costs and sold entire lines of goods at full retail prices, many retailers resisted the practice. Wanting control over its workforce, stock, and pricing, Macy's stopped using demonstrators altogether in 1928; other companies barred aggressive selling and required saleswomen to sell any product requested by customers.[70]

The use of hidden demonstrators continued into the 1940s, despite passage of legislation to curtail the practice. In the highly competitive cosmetics field, demonstrators provided an edge. "With most of the larger stores having from five to twenty demonstrators," an Armand salesman complained in 1929, "we can only hope to get a minimum amount of business." Throughout the 1920s Carl Weeks had opposed this "most debauching practice in modern merchandising," but even he gave in. As Armand sales declined during the Depression, he approached stores with push money and sought to place an "exclusive girl [who] will be high powered and should do us some good."[71]

That hidden demonstrators existed at all, however, is also testimony to the established tradition of beauty culture and to the significance of women's everyday beauty rituals. In employing demonstrators, manufacturers acknowledged that the cosmetics business required more than fantasy images of glamour and romance. It required communicating cosmetic information, educating consumers, providing services, and fostering women's sociability. "If a salesgirl began her talk as indi-

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rectly as some cosmetic copy," one demonstrator observed in 1933, "she would sell nothing." Like the relationship between beautician and client, or door-to-door agent and neighbor, the demonstrator mingled the intimate and the commercial. In a period when many women did not use cosmetics, demonstrators explained how to apply creams and makeup, urged women to buy related products or entire cosmetics lines, and persuaded them to try new preparations. They also steered patrons away from poor products and circulated hearsay about dangerous wares. "The demonstrators rather generally disparage liquid polish—in all lines—as a fundamentally unsatisfactory article," wrote a market researcher at a Brooklyn department store in 1921, which was probably an accurate assessment at that time. Some lied about competitors' brands, saying that Max Factor manufactured only theatrical makeup unsuitable for everyday use, or that Armand powder contained lead. Market researchers at the time marveled at the influence of the hidden demonstrator. "A woman may know a product more or less thru the advertising," explained one, "but a sales person can easily 'queer' a sale, or make it as the case may be." Secretly selling behind the counter, another commented about her customers, "you can talk them into almost anything."[72]

Producing a mass market for cosmetics involved a complicated mixture of borrowings and invention, images and interactions. In the process, women entrepreneurs were increasingly sidelined, retaining a presence mainly in the high-priced salon and African-American trade, but less able to compete in a mass market driven by national advertising, media, and distribution. Ironically the men who controlled the industry appropriated the methods of beauty culturists, engaged in female impersonation, and hired a new ensemble of business and professional women to translate beauty into business. Through close collaboration with magazine publishers, mass media, advertisers, and retailers, they threaded the new mass commerce in cosmetics into women's reading, shopping, theatergoing, and housework—the web of women's daily habits and social rounds.

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