Everyday Cosmetic Practices

"Facial decoration increasing," the trade paper *Toilet Requisites* happily announced in 1920, and indeed the use of beauty preparations, especially makeup, rose sharply in the years that followed.[1] To all appearances, the beauty industry had succeeded in delivering its message to women, that the fulfillment of individuality and femininity required the purchase of cosmetics. Still, these successes do not explain how women felt as they entered into the new consumer culture, how they read advertisements, what motivated them to buy cosmetics, or how they actually used makeup. Not everybody powdered and painted, and participation in the new beauty rituals varied greatly from woman to woman.

Unfortunately most women left few records of behavior so ordinary and taken for granted. But early market research, public debates about makeup use, and women's own letters permit a sketch of female purchasing habits and cosmetics use in the 1920s and 1930s. These sources are problematic and fragmentary, limited to white middle- and working-class women in several localities across the country. Nevertheless, they open to view a picture of women's everyday beauty prac-

tices otherwise obscured by the potent and influential images circulated by the cosmetics industry. They suggest how women negotiated the earlier disreputable meanings of paint and shaped our modern perceptions of makeup.[2]

Although the beauty industry claimed that American women everywhere were making up, the consumer surveys they commissioned show a wide spectrum of opinion about cosmetics and distinct patterns of use. Age, marital status, economic class, ethnic origins, and residence influenced women's relationship to the new mass market.

Before World War I makeup had been largely a phenomenon of the metropolis. New York City led the country in the cosmetic arts, as it did in so many other forms of cultural expression. Helena Rubinstein recalled that when she came to New York in 1915 she "was shocked even then by the numbers of young girls who were excessively made up." Cosmetics firms perceived New York to be a distinct market at the heart of the fashion trade, where the latest styles circulated rapidly not only in high society but among working-class retail clerks and dressmakers. At a time when American women tentatively dusted on rouge, New Yorkers painted their lips, flourished compacts, and even bought mascara and eye shadow, considered the most questionable type of makeup. Women in other large cities followed suit. In Chicago, one industry observer reported in the mid-1920s, wealthy women applied makeup "very carefully and sparingly," while working women "use it in astonishing quantities."[3]

In contrast, makeup came only gradually to Main Street. "Such a small percentage use cosmetics to any considerable extent," exclaimed a surprised executive at the J. Walter Thompson ad agency in 1927. In Topeka, Kansas, and Columbus, Ohio, middle-class housewives had begun to use such basic skin-care products as cold cream and vanishing cream, following the regimen promoted by beauty culturists and advertised by Pond's and other mass marketers. A substantial minority had even started to rouge, although, as they reported it, only with a

Small-town teenagers at the cosmetics counter. From Beauty, *1922.*

light touch. In contrast, poor and working-class wives interviewed in Providence, Rhode Island, and Chester, Pennsylvania, showed little use of any beautifier, let alone visible makeup. As late as 1933, low-income housewives, many of whom worked in factories and stores to support their families, did not so much resist beauty preparations as express indifference: Cosmetics were irrelevant to their lives.[4]

Cosmetics were even less prevalent in small towns and farming communities, where one-half of all Americans still dwelled in 1920.

Distribution was uneven. "Towns under 1,000 are hopeless," complained a Thompson investigator, since the general stores carried few beauty preparations, but in larger towns "up-to-date" druggists eagerly began to stock cosmetics. O. N. Falk's drugstore in Stoughton, Wisconsin, for example, sold mainly skin-care products and face powders before the mid-twenties, but then offered an enormous selection of brand-name rouges, lipsticks, and even complexion clay. Beauty shops began to surface in towns and villages, and mail-order sales served many rural women. Market research surveys even reported the occasional small-town woman who purchased Elizabeth Arden's high-priced preparations.[5]

Despite the availability of cosmetics, farm women indulged in skin-care regimens sporadically and adopted visible makeup only reluctantly. Most cleaned their faces with soap and warm water, but a small number had begun to develop the "cold cream habit." Many used powder, which was believed to protect the skin from the elements. City women's rouge and lipstick were uncommon, and one correspondent reported in 1927, "mascaro is just beginning to become a staple item in the smaller towns in the corn belt." It was not until the end of the 1930s that farm women's use of cosmetics approximated that of urban dwellers. A study by the *Farm Journal* of over two thousand rural families in 1941 reported that almost all women used face powder, two-thirds applied cold cream and rouge, and more than half wore lipstick. Even so, the study excluded the class of "illiterates, negroes, or submarginal farm families"—one-fifth of all farm women—considered strangers to consumer culture by national advertisers.[6]

These surveys show, in a general way, that makeup use dropped as household incomes declined, especially among married housewives. However, age and activity, broadly defined, appear to be more important indicators of makeup use. Women over forty might use powder but few wore rouge and lipstick; in the Providence survey, not one woman over sixty used any of these cosmetics. Among women under age twenty-five, on the other hand, virtually all used powder daily, three-quarters used rouge, and almost half wore lipstick. Visible makeup was

especially pronounced among wage-earners and college students. At Ohio State University and Pembroke College in 1927, makeup applications constituted a daily regimen. A 1931 study of college women similarly reported that over 85 percent wore rouge, lipstick, face powder, and nail polish, and spent about twelve to thirteen dollars a year on these items. Young stenographers, typists, and clerks also applied color regularly to cheeks and lips, transforming the painted face into a business uniform. At Macy's, working women were "the largest consumer of units of rouge and lipstick," crowding onto the selling floor during their lunch hour, sniffing powder compacts and "pay[ing] anything for Tangee, Incarnat, Indelible or Rubinstein's lipstick." Even high school girls had begun buying cosmetics.[7]

The beauty industry embraced national advertising, believing it effectively identified previously unrecognized "needs" and showed Americans how to fulfill their desires. Mass marketers applauded the rising subscription rates of traditional "home journals" and the new confession magazines. In them, women could find page after page of cosmetics advertising, detailed instructions on cosmetic applications, and inspirational stories of beautiful women. According to market researcher Nell B. Nichols, women read beauty columns "religiously" and studied magazines "like textbooks."[8]

Yet women's exposure to advertising was partial, their immersion in commercial beauty culture mediated and incomplete. The circulation of women's magazines varied greatly by economic class. In a 1923 study of Cincinnati magazine readers, 23 percent of professional and business families and 38 percent of clerical and skilled workers' households subscribed to *Woman's Home Companion;* in contrast, only 6 percent of those in low-paid working-class occupations—domestic workers, laborers, and factory operatives—did so. In 1930, while almost one-third of the wealthiest families in the United States (earning more than $10,000) purchased the *Ladies' Home Journal,* the number of subscribers declined steeply among the less prosperous. Even taking

into account the fact that magazines were purchased on newsstands and frequently handed around among friends and neighbors, many women, especially among the poor, had little exposure to national advertising.[9]

Low-income women often ignored advertised national brands and looked for "specials" on cosmetics, "house" brands, and cut-price sales. At Bloomingdale's, an investigator contrasted the Lexington Avenue circle that bought on charge accounts with the Third Avenue crowd, mainly foreign born, who "have limited money and buy on a price basis." Many women redeemed the manufacturers' coupons that appeared in advertisements to introduce the brand. Consumers, however, often saw free samples as an end in themselves. "The kinds [of cosmetics] I really like are too expensive, so I don't buy them," observed one woman. "I depend on samples." Farm and small-town women also engaged consumer culture selectively. They purchased some of the same nationally advertised brands as urban women—Pond's creams, for instance—but also bought many mail-order and door-to-door brands not found in urban stores. "In several cases the leaders in city stores attracted little demand in the country trade," one study noted.[10]

Even in the 1920s many women continued to make their own beauty preparations, following recipes handed down in families or between neighbors. Vinegar, cream, lemon juice and bay rum, or rosewater and white Vaseline went into popular homemade face lotions; these concoctions were second in popularity only to Hinds' Honey and Almond Lotion among rural readers of the *People's Home Journal* in 1925. Well into the 1930s, women used old-fashioned honey packs and oatmeal scrubs to improve the texture of the skin. The fans of *Modern Screen* and *Modern Romance,* mainly young urban working women who bought large quantities of makeup, still used many common substances from the kitchen or bathroom cabinet: peroxide and buttermilk to bleach the skin, Vaseline or castor oil to lengthen eyelashes, and witch hazel as an astringent.[11] A decade of aggressive advertising did not silence homespun views of skin care: Many women feared that commer-

cial creams spurred hair growth, advocated "ice [as] the best astringent," or used "white of egg to remove wrinkles and youthify."[12]

Early market research offers some insight into the ways women read beauty ads. Middle-class women seem to have been close readers. They were impressed with ads that gave detailed instructions, told an engaging story, or had striking illustrations. (Elizabeth Arden's ad of a beautiful woman's head wrapped in a towel often elicited comment.) When interviewed, women frequently used the language of commercial beauty culture to discuss their skin-care and grooming habits. Sounding like an advertisement, Topeka housewife Nell Read observed that vanishing cream "makes the powder go on smooth and gives a velvet-like appearance." "I had a very hard, tough skin that 'nobody loved to touch' until I used your soap," wrote a Southern debutante on a Woodbury's questionnaire; "now it is smooth and velvety and everybody loves to touch it."[13]

College students in particular quoted advertising slogans verbatim—"a skin you love to touch," a "school girl complexion"—when describing and evaluating their own faces. In a Thompson study of Vassar students, "again and again phrases that had been used in the Woodbury advertising were used by the girls, with apparent unconsciousness." University of Chicago students wrote on their questionnaires that Woodbury's "actually draws the dust and dirt out of the pores" and "one feels deliciously clean and fresh after using it." One even commented on its "psychological effect": "I always imagine myself *radiant*—like the pink-cheeked girl in the advertisement—after I use it."[14]

However, relatively few college students in these surveys directly connected beauty products to the promise of romance and glamour common in advertisements. A Smith student who "longed for Romance and thought perhaps a beautiful complexion would make me more fascinating" made a rare admission among the respondents. Instead, college women mainly evaluated the promises of beauty ads according to practical considerations—whether their skin was dry or blemished, for instance, or if their area had hard water or sooty air.[15]

This market research, intended to convince manufacturers to invest

in advertising, ironically reveals a significant degree of consumer indifference. Although complexion care dominated national cosmetics advertising in this period, most women did not purchase home treatments, massage the face, or follow a beauty "system." An extensive survey of Milwaukee consumers in 1923 found that only 7 percent used the four creams—cold, cleansing, vanishing, and night cream—that composed a complete skin-care regimen. Efforts to sell entire product lines repeatedly failed; at Macy's, four-fifths of cosmetics sales were of single items. Moreover, women tended to use skin-care products according to their own lights. Despite the advertisers' best efforts, women confused cold cream and vanishing cream, often applying them interchangeably and erratically. In the Columbus survey, many women reported they used cold cream or vanishing cream (74 percent and 57 percent respectively), but a much smaller percentage applied them daily (45 percent and 21 percent).[16]

Indeed, many women expressed suspicion of cosmetics ads, seeing them as so much bunk. To the dismay of J. Walter Thompson executives, most women interviewed in Columbus offered "no reaction" to the Pond's testimonial advertisements, and less than one-third remembered them well enough to describe them. Even fewer Chester and Providence women recalled the ads, again a figure that dropped as income declined. Those who did often questioned the motives of the wealthy women who endorsed Pond's creams. For every woman who praised the socialites' testimonials—"it brings the story home to you to read about women whose names are known"—there was another consumer who wondered skeptically, "Why do they do it? What do they get?" Women demanded factual discussion of makeup techniques, not extravagant claims and romantic copy. As radio became a popular medium, they often objected to commercials for cosmetics and personal hygiene intrusively entering the home. Lady Esther's warning of the dangers of "gritty face powder" caused many listeners to turn down the volume. "If I hear 'Lady Esther' tell me to put that powder between my teeth and if I find grits," wrote an irate woman to NBC, "I will be likely to tear my hair out."[17]

Women approached advertising messages not as isolated consumers but as social actors, reading their warnings and advice in light of personal experiences and local contexts. Family and friends, class and social background all came into play as women assessed the salience of an advertisement in their lives. One middle-class woman, for instance, judged a Pond's testimonial advertisement "interesting in a way," but stated she "would be more interested if my next-door neighbor told me what good results she had had." Commenting on the ad's high-society endorser, she continued:

> Some of the wealthy women probably don't have as bad skins to care for as people who have come from large families with small incomes where doctors were too expensive to be called in always, and skins sometimes suffered because diseases were inadequately cared for. So what Queen Marie does for her skin which is probably very smooth to begin with, would not help me as much as what my next-door neighbor uses.

Her comment makes tangible the results of unpublished market studies in the 1920s and 1930s: Women never cited advertising as the primary reason they purchased cosmetics. Consumers repeatedly named free samples, retailers' recommendations, and saleswomen before they mentioned ads as their motivation to buy.[18]

Ultimately, the most important influences on women's cosmetic practices were personal. Sometimes friends discouraged each other from appearing "painted." Sometimes women talked themselves out of making up simply by imagining the censure of their neighbors: They feared to look "ridiculous without knowing it." Mrs. Edwin Austin, a Topeka housewife, expressed "no prejudice" against other women wearing rouge but thought "she would be conscious every minute of the addition and knows all her friends would be remarking about Mrs. Austin and her rouge."[19]

Often women egged each other on, encouraging participation in a practice whose questionable reputation persisted. "Most products are

bought by woman to woman advice," confirmed *McCall's* beauty editor. Makeup circulated in familiar rounds of sociability: A sister would make a present of a box of rouge; a friend would advise another to put a little color in her cheeks. At first Rachel Neiswender "thought it was a disgrace to be seen with artificial color," but then her friends started using rouge and she gave in. Mrs. George Chambers received rouge as a Christmas present from a friend who "knew I would never use any if it wasn't given to me so I would make the start."[20]

Children, both young and grown, also persuaded women to take the plunge. The Topeka housewives frequently attributed their first use of rouge to the influence of daughters and sons. Mrs. Sidney Smith's seven-year-old daughter came home from school one day and asked her mother to make her cheeks "pink and pretty," and she complied. An elderly woman who had given little thought to such matters explained that "her children kept urging her to make the start" and her "thoughtful son" had even bought her a box of rouge. "She says she now feels as uncomfortable without it as she does without her powder," the interviewer stated.[21]

Advertising promoted cosmetics as a means of winning and keeping a husband. As a cultural *practice*, however, making up more often underscored women's ties to other women, not to men. Married women, at least, rarely mentioned husbands as the reason they began to use makeup. Although some spouses "approved the results," more often women identified men as the reason they did *not* wear cosmetics or hid their use. Men's letters to the *Seattle Union Record* in 1925 generally opposed the use of paint, and market researchers recorded male complaints about wives' beauty rituals. One woman, for instance, explained she did not use cold cream because her "husband objects to my fussing with [my] face when going to bed."[22]

Women seemed to be engaged in a running conversation about cosmetics with other women, whether nearby friends or distant experts. They sought makeup advice from magazine beauty editors, approached salesclerks and beauty salon operatives, and even asked cosmetic debunkers and market researchers to recommend products. In one mar-

Christmas shopping in the toiletries department, R. H. Macy's in New York, 1942.

ket study, New York housewives turned the tables on the interviewers, sought their cosmetic preferences, and tried "to become investigators themselves," the Market Research Corporation reported with amazement. Women bought toiletries in a different way than household goods, wrote another investigator, because "personal preference" played a greater role. "There is a certain joy in the actual shopping," she observed of cosmetics consumers, in which "leisure, comparisons, subtle persuasion and discussion play an important part."[23]

The social pleasures of beautifying certainly received attention from drugstores, beauty parlors, and manufacturers, who believed that

"beauty days" and demonstrations promoted cosmetics sales. But women themselves sometimes organized activities around the pursuit of beauty, inserting the products of commerce into their own social activities and cultural rituals. Women's clubs invited beauty experts and manufacturers' representatives to speak on cosmetics. Some women collected free samples to be given away as prizes at church fairs and fund-raisers. Others created party games using cosmetics ads cut out of magazines or went to costume parties dressed as advertisements. The recognition that beauty culture was an influential language among women helps explain this apparent incongruity: During the 1920 election campaign in Brooklyn—the first election after passage of the women's suffrage amendment—a Democratic party worker left small vanity-bag mirrors with each woman voter she canvassed.[24]

Although sometimes derided as "lazy women's tricks," makeup applications ultimately proved much more popular than beauty culture regimens. Face powder, rouge, and lipstick were more frequently used than vanishing cream, astringents, and "skin food." Women purchased many different brands, restlessly looking for new and better tools for the cosmetic arts; no one company commanded a large percentage of the market for rouge and lipstick, and top sellers changed frequently in the 1920s and 1930s. Moreover, almost all women who reported *any* use of visible makeup applied it daily. For young women, whether in college or at work, "putting on a face" had become a routine part of dressing in the morning, a part of their personality.[25]

In letters and interviews, women defended making up as creative work. They made this assertion in the face of a barrage of comments from men mystified and affronted by the makeup craze. In 1925 a man calling himself the "Sick-O'-Paint Father" started a debate in Ruth Ridgway's column of the *Seattle Union Record* with a complaint about his wife's embrace of makeup. Once she was "one of the prettiest girls in town," but now "it takes more stuff to get her ready to go out than it does to cook a five-course dinner." Paint and powder had turned his

A male cartoonist's view of makeup in 1934.

companionate, domestic wife into some strange, unclean creature. All he wanted was "a sweet, clean kiss that we can't eat off our lips afterwards." Abraham Mondamin, an "ornery bachelor," agreed: "Who wants to get his face all gummed up with that sort of 'Goo'?" For these men, the actual texture and look of makeup, as well as its sexual symbolism, triggered male revulsion.[26]

What men ridiculed as "goo" and "junk" commanded an elaborate vocabulary among cosmetics users. Women precisely discussed their features and skin, the qualities of different preparations, and their assessments of brand-name products. Despite advertisers' aggressive promotion of vanishing cream as a base for face powder, women rejected a preparation that "constricted their face," "made the powder lumpy," or "made the rouge blotchy." They commented upon the most obvious characteristic of face powder, its different tints, but also debated more subtle properties, powder's "hand," "weight," and adhesiveness. Creams also came in different consistencies, and women made detailed evaluations. "Old users," one investigator observed, "ask[ed] for their creams with confidence," taking pride in the knowledge of their skin and appropriate treatments. "I like a heavy, waxy cream, such as Hudnuts 'Marvellous' was for many years," wrote Blanche Snyder to consumer advocate M. C. Phillips, "but now that name is given to an oily 'liquifying' cream." Readers' letters, observed the beauty editor of *Smart Set* magazine, "are astonishingly analytical [and] go into most astounding details as though women had studied themselves for hours."[27]

Makeup continued to be understood by many men as the mark of women's artificiality and guile. Writing to the *Seattle Union Record*, Marco B. called it a "method of seeking satisfaction . . . by falseness and deception" and "a confession of women's shallowness and incapacity." In response, cosmetics-using women translated the sign of artifice into the language of artistry. Making up required adroit skill, an aesthetic sensibility, and hard work. "It takes time, care and practice to use cosmetics," Senga R. shot back. "You can't sit down and just 'daub' it on."[28]

The test of that skill in the twenties involved the application of rouge, which had strong symbolic associations with prostitution. In this period, rouge came in three forms—powder, cream, and liquid—and the coloring was very bright, usually red, pink, or orange. Too little made no difference to one's appearance; too much stamped the wearer as vulgar and tasteless. Several Topeka housewives claimed they did not rouge because they could not manage to apply it artistically. Mrs. W. Pattison used rouge on occasion but thought it "a waste of time to work with it, trying to make it appear natural." Another woman, the interviewer reported, said "she tried using liquid rouge once and it gave the appearance of two birth marks on each cheek."[29]

Women stressed that they did not blindly follow ads and advice columns but experimented with different products. "I began remaking my complexion by asking my friends what they used," explained Violet Osler, winner of a *Household* magazine contest on cosmetics use. "What suited one did not always suit me, so I had to try again." The beauty editor of *Harper's Bazaar* observed that women were "quick to realize their own reactions, they will experiment but throw away that which doesn't agree." They often used products in ways not intended by their manufacturers. A surprising number of women working at the J. Walter Thompson agency, thoroughly familiar with cosmetics advertising, nonetheless applied paste rouge to their lips and lipstick to their cheeks. Perceiving little distinction between these products, they were as likely to follow their own muse as the manufacturer's instructions when making up.[30]

Cosmetics users often found in their experimentation and artistry a physical and psychological pleasure. The cosmetic substances and tools themselves delighted the senses. "Women pick up a powder compact and automatically smell it," noted an investigator working at a toiletries department. "I never saw this to fail." Enamelled and painted compact cases, with ingenious compartments for rouge and powder, tempted the hand: "If the shape or decoration of the container pleased, the customer took the compact," often disregarding the unbecoming shade of the powder inside. The new, jewel-like lipstick cylinders also

had a magnetic appeal, but old-fashioned pots of lip coloring and large lipsticks with "unsightly paper wrappers" did not sell at all. Little wonder that Armand representatives were taught that getting women to touch the package would make the sale.[31]

Also pleasurable were the moments of relaxation and respite from the demands of work. The surprising popularity of beauty clays and masks in the 1920s may have been due to the pause they sanctioned. After applying the Clasmic Beautifier, instructed Boncilla Laboratories, "then—for 30 minutes if possible—sit down or lie down and rest." It emphasized, "No exercise or effort is required of you." The Watkins Company even promoted a five-minute beauty break for wage earners.[32]

Most important, making up was labor performed for the self, labor that men often could not readily comprehend. The Sick-O'-Paint Father, unable to understand why women did such things to their faces, wondered if it was to please men or to make other women jealous. When he asked his wife, she "gave the funniest reason of all": "She says she does it to please herself. Can you beat that? All that work TO PLEASE HERSELF!" Market studies confirmed women's commitment to these intimate, sensuous commodities: They desired to keep their looks more than they wanted to acquire labor-saving devices; they would buy cheaper groceries before they would give up on skin cream; and they were "much better able to recall names of favorite brands of cosmetics than they were of canned goods."[33] Makeup per se was no longer a matter of immorality, but a right, a necessity, and especially a pleasure. "Of course the 'bad women' cold creamed and powdered and painted," wrote an elderly woman, "but is that any reason why 'decent' women, who are married or otherwise, cannot have the right to make themselves as attractive as possible, instead of making themselves look and feel so miserable."[34]

Even before the widespread dissemination of beauty preparations and cosmetics advertising, women understood care for appearance as a sign of personality, a self-regard neither indulgent nor narcissistic. Farm

women in upstate New York, for instance, questioned about physical culture in the early 1900s, equated good appearance with a modern sense of self that was distinct from their roles as wives or homemakers. "I have neighbors who work all day, every day, never [have] time to wash, comb and change dress in afternoon," wrote one farm wife, "so married women seem to lose all pride." When asked how much time she invested in taking care of her body, Edith Enders, married to an abusive husband, scrawled, "not as much as I would were I a free citizen or as I did before I was in bondage to a despot." Another advised her farm sisters to groom and dress carefully after the housework was finished. "It pays to feel that you are keeping in touch with the world, and all the little things count," she said.[35]

Aware of the historic changes in women's lives, those who did not use makeup in the 1920s called themselves "old-fashioned," "homebodies," and "soap-and-water" women. Many of these old-fashioned women had long worn face powder and skin cream to protect the face against hard water, harsh weather, dirt, and soot; they purchased highly adhesive, white or "flesh" colored powder, with a medium or heavy weight. Their resistance was to makeup, used to change appearance. Although some of them stated a moral opposition to rouge, more often they expressed a sense of discomfort with "paint," as they still called it, a poor fit between their sense of self and a made-up appearance. Ashamed and ill at ease, they described rouge as an inexorable force: Although they were "trying to avoid wearing" it, they felt they would be "won over to it" or "have to yield to it sooner or later."[36]

In contrast, the self-proclaimed "moderns" leaped into the culture of beauty with determination and viewed making up as a bold act of cosmetic self-fashioning. "I had always used Kiss-proof powder," observed Violet Osler, "and I got up the courage to use the rouge and lipstick." These women saw makeup not as a protective covering but as a medium of expression. They embraced the idea of matching makeup shades to skin tones and character types. "Young girls know the shade of powder best adapted to their complexion," observed an investigator in 1923, but "older women were not familiar with the names Rachel

and Naturelle," two of the newer shades. By 1930 most cosmetics-users wanted face powder to "blend with [the] skin."[37]

Their behavior echoed some but not all the messages promoted in mass-market advertising in the 1920s. Advertisers urged women to maintain youthful beauty, to express their personality, to enjoy the social whirl of dances and beach parties, but most of all, to seek love and marriage. When the Sick-O'-Paint Father wondered if women made up to attract men or incite female envy, he restated a view that circulated throughout American culture. "As a 'feminist' I hate to say it," wrote marketing expert Christine Frederick in *Selling Mrs. Consumer*, but "women's chief business in life still appears to be to charm and hold a man." Articles with such titles as "I Cured My Pimples—and Became a Bride" and "How a Wife Won Back Her Youth—A Surrender to Ugliness That Nearly Cost a Husband's Love" ran often in romance and beauty magazines. Popular movies like *Why Change Your Wife* and *Dancing Mothers* similarly advanced a modern, youthful appearance as the cure for marital problems.[38]

In linking appearance and female personality, however, the agencies of consumer culture denied the full measure of women's experiences. Advertisements promised youth but remained silent about the effects of time, hard work, and illness on the body; they celebrated the modern young woman as a dancing, romancing free spirit, but erased most signs of her status as a wage earner. Modernist drawings of flappers and photographs of movie stars offered commercial ideals of beauty for imitation far removed from the lives of most women.

Women, in contrast, incorporated cosmetics into the "true story" of their lives, adopting the confessional technique of advertisers but changing the subject. "Women proceed to dramatize themselves" when writing for beauty advice, commented a magazine editor. Like the consumer who judged Pond's face cream in relation to poverty and poor health, these women told of everyday experiences, delights, and struggles. Making up indeed figured in women's dreams of love, their pleasures in self-display, and anxieties over male approval. But in their accounts, their desire for youthful beauty had as much to do with aging

bodies, loss of vibrancy, the requirements of employers, and the physical demands of housework and child rearing.[39]

Older women, for instance, often discussed skin care and rouge as a means of veiling the real and deeply felt effects of time and labor. Childbearing, illness, and household duties in an era when women had few labor-saving devices all took their toll on the body. Writing for advice they would explain, "I'm run down and my skin isn't in good condition."[40] They did not want husbands to see their artifice, yet expressed a belief that women's work led them to need artificial beautifiers. Mrs. Charles Crabb described her "struggle to avoid" the use of rouge, but that weariness from housework had made her pale. "Rouge is for the woman who has had color which has been lost with the years," observed Mrs. Edgar May. These women viewed the made-up face as their social face, put on when going shopping or visiting, or applied at dinnertime. Crabb "admitted that she did not powder her face in the morning or when working around the house," but did so before going out or after supper; Mrs. Howard Beagle "applies rouge whenever going away from home but seldom uses it unless she is going away or is expecting company."[41]

Working women too placed cosmetics use within a life story. "I'll admit that we use cosmetics a little too strongly," observed the class-conscious Senga R., but "not all people can diet properly, have regular hours and 'proper attire.' No, not on the present wage system." She described why working women might need to make up: "It's hard to get up at 6, work till 5 or 6, rush home, eat, and either step out or do some odd jobs around home, and still have rosy cheeks and sparkling eyes." A young woman wrote consumer activist M. C. Phillips that facial hair had "become almost an obsession," making her a "gullible victim for Koremlu [depilatory] advertising." But it was her job, which placed her "in contact with people all the time in my capacity in a local Newspaper Office," that had kindled her "obsession" and deepened her credulity.[42]

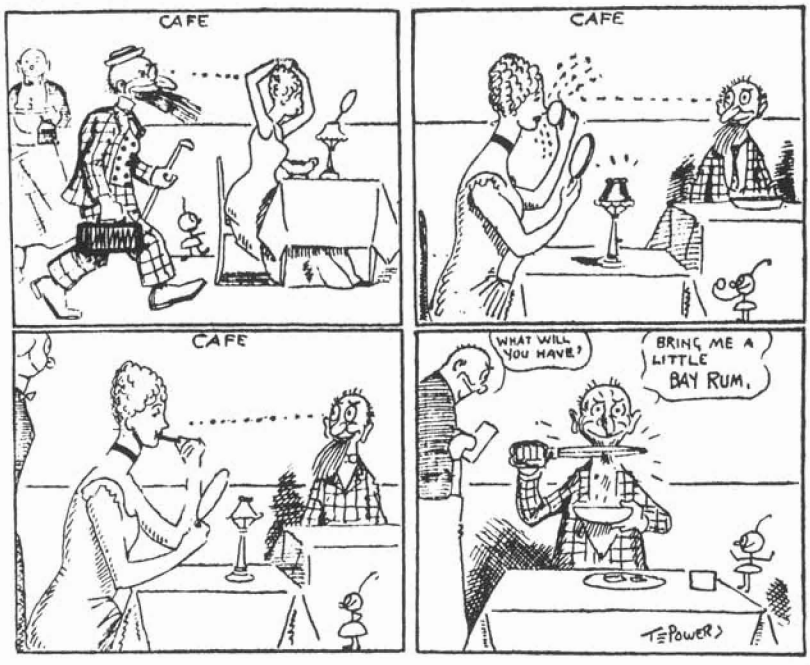
The creative "work" of makeup tended in two distinct directions, toward an embrace of artifice, on the one hand, and toward an aesthetic of the

"natural," on the other. Some women applied makeup with a heavy touch, relishing bright colors, reshaping lips, restructuring cheekbones. For them, makeup was makeover, the transformation of appearance and self. Others believed makeup should be undetectable and imitate the "bloom of youth"—an illusionistic and transparent medium through which a woman's true identity could be expressed. They made up to appear "natural," modulating, not making over, the appearance of the face.

Young working women often embraced a flamboyant and conspicuous look. They not only wore ruby lipstick outlining "bee-stung" lips, but regularly accented their eyes with eye shadow and mascara, products few women used in the daytime, if at all. "The shop girl has lost all sense of perspective," one industry observer chided. "Each of her cheeks are a blooming peony. Her eyes are two smudges of dusky, shadowy black. Her lips are cruel with scarlet." The theatrical aesthetic of makeup especially appealed to sexually active and defiant young women—considered delinquents and "problem girls"—whose crimson cheeks and beaded lashes called attention to surface, color, and texture, not the imitation of nature. They used makeup to play with the image of the "hussy," even as they rejected the stigmatizing label others placed on them.[43]

Many women delighted in the display of makeup's artifice. While older women tended to buy loose powder, the young flapper adopted the compact as a fashion accessory and prop in a public performance. Making up in restaurants, on commuter trains, and in movie houses drew attention to the fabrication of appearance. In the workplace as well, women powdered their noses through the day, halting the company's work to indulge momentarily their desire for beauty and, doubtless, to take a break. As they put on a feminine face, these women briefly claimed a public space, stopping the action, in a sense, by making a spectacle of themselves. Making up spotlighted the self in a gesture at once forceful and feminine, as a tale told of aviator Ruth Elder suggests. Crossing the Atlantic, Elder was plagued with trouble in flight and required rescue; when she stepped off the plane, her first act was to powder her nose.[44]

The Joys and Gloom of Life—By T. E. Powers in N. Y. American



A cartoonist's commentary on "face-fixing" in public. Toilet Requisites, *1917.*

Aviator Phoebe Omlie powders her nose after winning a national transcontinental air derby in 1931.

"Glamour" and "charm" did not so much define different women as different styles. Respectable young women distinguished themselves from "tough girls" through the subtle application of rouge and lipstick. Tangee was especially popular—typically the first lipstick girls were allowed to use—because it appeared to complement natural lip color, not cover it up. But daytime and evening makeup styles also permitted the same women to create different versions of themselves: a ladylike appearance on the job, a more provocative one at the dance hall or cabaret.[45]

For young women, makeup declared adult status—social and sexual maturity—often before parents were ready to grant it. Margaret Parton, later an editor at the *Ladies' Home Journal,* battled her mother over makeup, permanent waves, and heels in the 1930s, and one summer, "driven by an urge to change my school girl image," she "dressed up as what I thought a prostitute might look like, complete with charcoal on my eyelids, a spit curl, and a cigarette."[46] The sudden appearance of rouge and lipstick on a teenage girl's face often accompanied a demand to keep more of her wages, to choose her boyfriends, and to enjoy greater autonomy in leisure activities.

Many daughters of immigrant parents put on makeup to look "American," expressing their new sense of national identity and personal freedom by consuming beauty preparations. In the novel *Bread Givers,* Anzia Yezierska carefully depicts a young Jewish immigrant woman's desires and confusion over appearance. Her protagonist, Sara Smolinsky, works long hours in a laundry, goes to night school, and looks, to her eyes, prematurely old and ugly. Crying "I want to be looked at, longed for, followed," Sara buys lipstick, powder, and rouge to "let loose the love of colour in me." Looking in the mirror at her red lips and cheeks, she proclaims, "Now I was exactly like the others!" But unsettled by her workmates' derision and her own doubts, Sara quickly rejects her painted "American" face as untrue to herself.[47]

Some parents erupted at what they considered an emblem of sexual waywardness, if not outright prostitution. In one 1937 study of high school girls, over half reported family fights over lipstick. Makeup use especially vexed immigrant parents, who considered makeup one more

sign of the breakdown of familial control and moral standards. A daughter of Hungarian Catholic parents complained bitterly about her tradition-bound parents, who refused to let her go dancing, date men unchaperoned, or wear makeup. "All this is vanity and God doesn't like it," she quoted them as saying. "God wants every girl to be just like he made her." Some of these conflicts ended up in juvenile court: One Los Angeles judge barred an "incorrigible" eighteen-year-old girl "from any use of make-up, such as rouge and pencil, which she has been using against the mother's desire for some time past." For Mexican-American parents, the popularity of Hollywood film stars and barrio beauty pageants made opposition to makeup a losing battle by the late 1930s.[48]

But beautifying did not always create generational conflict: If the younger generation pioneered in cosmetics use, some mothers tried to keep up. Mother-and-daughter skin-care regimens were common in the Topeka households. Mrs. W. Pattison "never gave much time to caring for [her skin] until her daughter started to take an interest in such matters." The daughter, who attended high school, was a manufacturer's dream consumer, regularly using Pompeian night and day creams and rouge. Her mother was less habitual, putting on the day cream when leaving the house and applying rouge occasionally. This mother believed that maintaining an attractive appearance was a maternal duty, one which gave pleasure to her children and modeled proper behavior. During a period when the gap between the generations appeared to be widening, a number of mothers reached across the chasm by appearing more up-to-date, in the belief that their influence would be strengthened through modern looks. Mrs. Sidney Smith observed that "she is trying to use cosmetics wisely so Harriet and Mary Louise will do the same when they are grown."[49]

A few mothers seem to have gone beyond their daughters in embracing the modern style of "flaming youth," despite traditional proscriptions. Massachusetts caseworkers reported a woman right out of *True Story,* who went to the big city, painted her face, and abandoned her children. Latino immigrants bemoaned the influence of American culture on their wives. "Even my old woman has changed on me," went

a popular ballad. "She wears a bobtailed dress of silk, goes about painted like a piñata, and goes at night to the dancing hall."[50]

For many women, makeup was a way of expressing class identity. Posing as clerks behind the counter, J. Walter Thompson investigators in the early 1920s often remarked on class and ethnic variations in cosmetics purchases. Jewish wage earners, Park Avenue socialites, and Brooklyn housewives all had particular looks and brand preferences, often recognized and reinforced by salesclerks. Saleswomen quickly sized up their patrons and judged what they could afford. A clerk selling Arden, Elcaya, and Pond's creams at Lord and Taylor said that "she could tell by the appearance of the customer which cream to offer." But the crafting of consumer identities was not reducible to price. Scent, color palettes, and packaging carried elusive but legible signs of status. The wealthiest patrons looked for, and were shown, high-priced or imported brands with light scent and natural tints. "Jewish flappers," in contrast, typically bought white powder in compacts and deep red or orange lipstick made by Angelus. "All Jewish girls use" it, a Walgreen's clerk in downtown Chicago explained: "She never asks what brand they want but gets the Angelus drawer out when she sees them coming." Bright red lipstick and glossy nail enamel, new products in the early 1920s, won acceptance slowly among "refined" middle-class women. As one Thompson staffer a decade later recalled, "I thought it was extremely vulgar to go around with 'varnish' on the nails."[51]

Viewed as a form of aesthetic expression embedded in life stories, applied in many different ways, makeup asserted no single or uniform meaning. Women used makeup with many different, contradictory ends in mind: to play the lady or the hussy, to look older or younger, to signify common identities as "American" and "respectable," or to invoke class and ethnic distinctions. Supple and negotiable, makeup could always be washed off and applied anew.

Ideals of beauty were shaped not only by the messages of the cosmetics industry and the everyday scrutiny of husbands and children, neigh-

bors and friends. As Helena Rubinstein observed, there were many audiences to please and impress. From state fairs to beauty contests, dance pavilions to street corners, women's appearances drew eyes that looked and judged.[52]

Beauty contests had evolved from modest May Day celebrations to the spectacle of the Miss America pageant in 1921, where physical proportions, facial beauty, and appealing personality delineated the feminine ideal. By 1930 beauty contests were even held in high schools, as one Fresno superintendent explained, to make students more interested in personal care; a physical education teacher rated girls' skin, hair, muscle tone, and general appearance, among other criteria. At the Iowa state fair, judges measured young women against a yardstick of health and rural virtue. The winner in 1926, reported the *Des Moines Register,* "uses no powder or rouge, cares nothing for boys and dates, does not dance, and rarely goes to the movies."[53] Very different standards applied elsewhere.

The movies—with their highly made-up stars, glamorous lighting, and close-ups—particularly influenced the way American women and men looked at women. Female fans took pleasure in actresses who were "always first with the latest" and copied their appearance and gestures. In a massive study on movies and conduct, led by sociologist Herbert Blumer in the late 1920s and early 1930s, three-fourths of the "delinquent girls" said they heightened their sex appeal by imitating movie stars' clothes, hair, and cosmetics. Said one, "I learned how to put on make-up and how to do different ways of make-up and how to make my make-up and clothes go together." Going to the movies, they gained a sense of themselves not as "bad girls" but as romantic, glamorous heroines. Fan magazines, addressing young urban working women, reinforced the appeal of emulating the stars. As reformer Hazel Ormsbee accurately observed, these magazines understood that their readers "possess little or no capital or savings and . . . their assets are personal qualities."[54]

At the same time, "movie autobiographies" written for the Blumer study suggest that women's relationship to the screen was less direct im-

itation than a negotiation between one's sense of self and the ideal female images. While one fan enjoyed "reveling in pictures where beautiful clothes are displayed," another got "an inkling of what I could do with that sense of adventure of mine" from watching serial heroines. Women tried out Greta Garbo's hair style or Clara Bow's perky looks, but clearly recognized the gap between their appearance and the stars'. One woman admired actress Vilma Banky: "I sure wish I could look like her! I've tried, but it's impossible." Another, after seeing Lillian Gish in *Way Down East* at age twelve, even resolved "to refrain from using any cosmetics so as to appear as frail and ethereal as she."[55]

Men also learned new ways to look at and assess women from the movies. A male college student explained that he chose his "girl friends on the basis of [his] favorite actresses." Italian street-corner youth revealed that movie beauty—the immoral platinum blonde and the chaste brunette—influenced their perceptions of women off the screen. These ways of seeing in turn influenced women's decisions about fashioning their appearance. As one college woman wrote, the movies had intensified her awareness that "men place a high premium on the physical aspect of woman."[56]

If women learned to see their faces in the "looks" of movie stars and in the stares of male companions, they also found that appropriate appearance was an unspoken requirement on the job. "Here in America," said Helena Rubinstein, "women's employers, or their customers, are often the audience they want to please." Such requirements were not new, of course. Restaurant owners had often sought attractive waitresses as a lure for male customers. "In one place the pretty girls were put downstairs, where the men were served," stated reformer Louise de Koven Bowen, "and the homely girls were put upstairs, in the room reserved for women customers." With the mix of immigrant and second-generation women seeking jobs, the requirements often took on an ethnic tinge. Clerical workers and saleswomen with Anglo-Saxon features and genteel manners were favored, while women of Southern European ancestry complained that "their dark skin was against them" in gaining employment.[57]

Such appearance requirements at work became increasingly regimented in the 1920s and 1930s. The expansion of personnel management and vocational guidance codified judgments about the proper fit between face and job. Employment tests appraised bodily appearance; one prototype included spaces for recording an applicant's use of makeup and hair dye, "the peroxide blonde being always looked upon with suspicion." In an article ostensibly about job skills and placement, a New York State Employment Service staffer blamed stenographers' unemployment on their personal appearance: The jobless included a woman with a "broken-out and pimpled complexion" and an applicant wearing "a blood-red hue of nail polish, a frilly dress and high heels." Guidance counselors at Smith College routinely noted graduating students' "attractiveness" in their records.[58]

Cosmetics played an essential part in the new business look. Executives wanted to hire "a girl who looks normal," which included tasteful cosmetics on the job, but not glamour. "No eye shadow, no mascara, no mauve powders or orange rouge for the business girl in office hours!" warned one advice manual.[59] Some companies integrated beauty protocols into training and job performance. Telephone operators, although unseen by the public, faced many requirements for on-the-job appearance and demeanor; A.T.&T.'s newsletter *Long Lines* stressed personal grooming, modern clothes, and attractiveness. Although its founder wrote in 1917 that "a natural smile beats all the artificial decoration in the world," two decades later Statler Hotels directed waitresses to appear at their stations wearing "light makeup." The H. J. Heinz Company even instituted weekly manicures for its pickle packers. Initially a sanitary measure, the program proved so popular it expanded to instruct workers on proper makeup.[60]

For young women about to enter the workforce, commercial colleges and YWCAs began to offer "self-development" courses with instructions on skin care, makeup, manicuring, and hair styling. By the early 1920s, YWCA clubs for young wage earners no longer required that members "refrain from using rouge and face beautifiers" and cautiously endorsed "wholesome" makeup and noon-hour beauty demon-

strations. These programs were considered especially important for daughters of immigrant parents, who, it was presumed, had little exposure to proper "American" standards of grooming. At the same time, instructors hoped that lessons in beautifying would improve morale and productivity on the job.[61]

Working women well understood the hidden rules of appearance. Many made up fully when they went to work in the morning, and they touched up often. Florence Miller, an ambitious stenographer "much interested in appearing her best," applied rouge and powder four times a day, "before going to work in the morning, when going to lunch at noon, before leaving the office at night and after dinner in the evening." Some waitresses might wear a made-up, glamorous look to increase their tips, but many big-city clerical and sales employees put on subdued face colors, taking such care in making up and dressing well that they would not be readily identified as working girls. One Russian immigrant stated clearly the economic consequences of ignoring appearance requirements, even as she acknowledged the psychic cost of following them. She had failed repeatedly to find a job, because employers took one look at her leather jacket, a treasured "symbol both of Revolution and elegance," and rejected her as a troublesome Bolshevik. After a year without work, "I dressed myself in the latest fashion, with lipstick in addition, although it was so hard to use at first that I blushed, felt foolish, and thought myself vulgar," she wrote. "But I got a job."[62]

Educational institutions increasingly saw themselves as caretakers of female appearance. Most schools in the 1920s tried to deter teens from wearing makeup or applying it in public, and some banned it outright. Home economics courses, taken by one-third of all girls in public high schools by 1928, preached cleanliness, body care, and good taste. It was not long, however, before beauty and cosmetics became an academic subject.[63]

Women's magazines, manufacturers, and retailers worked with home economics instructors to teach grooming and quietly insinuate their names into budding consumer awareness. The *Ladies' Home Journal* and *Woman's Home Companion* produced how-to booklets, *McCall's*

developed a "Charm Group Program," and Helena Rubinstein sent representatives to speak in schools. Several toiletries manufacturers had long distributed instructional materials on hygienic body care, including toothbrushing and manicure. By 1940, an explicit beauty appeal had become acceptable enough in schools that cosmetics firms like Revlon promoted this noncommercial tie-in. Consumer activism also appeared in classrooms. Students read exposés of the beauty industry or worked on scientific investigations. Excessive cosmetics use tended to be discouraged and sometimes disciplined. "We had a nail polish removal in assembly this morning," wrote high school senior Helene Harmon Weis in her 1939 diary. "Miss Braley always enjoys them so."[64]

Soon beauty education was everywhere. Home extension services gave rural wives lessons on making an attractive appearance; 4-H clubs provided girls with "self-checking" charts and ran fashion shows; the Alma Archer House of Smartness and International Charm Insti-

A lesson in grooming at Cornell University.

tute taught New York women how to succeed in business through better grooming. In colleges and universities, deans of women gave first-year students grooming instructions. At Cornell, where incoming coeds often appeared on campus wearing too much makeup ("lipstick an inch thick—you couldn't miss it," complained a sorority sister) or too little, home economics courses offered units on facial care. In 1936, one junior college even hired a clothing stylist and cosmetician to start a beauty consultation service for its students.[65]

Vocational experts, home economists, and psychologists all agreed that good looks had developmental and aesthetic as well as commercial value. In the mid-1930s, social scientists reported that personal appearance significantly influenced young women's self-expression and self-esteem, findings publicized in magazines for parents. The Depression itself weighed less heavily on those who took beauty lessons, the experts claimed, because such lessons might offer an edge in the job market and, in any case, would lift the spirits of young women "who are finding themselves in a world which seems to have little or nothing for them."[66] Educators and professionals responsible for socializing girls, and often contemptuous of the beauty industry, had come to accept one of its basic premises.

In 1930, the beauty editor of *Smart Set* observed that the cosmetics consumer is "out after something and is disillusioned on empty promises." Her comment heralded a shift in attitudes toward beauty products. Criticisms of commercial cosmetics as overpriced, injurious, and fraudulent spread widely. These had been heard before, but now they circulated in a very different context, in which making up was rapidly becoming the feminine norm. If not depression-proof, cosmetics sales remained strong. Women who went without new clothes could still afford to indulge in a new lipstick. Most families spent only small amounts on personal care items, about 2 percent of their household income, but this added up to a total outlay of $750 million nationally on cosmetics and beauty shops in 1931.[67]

"American Chamber of Horrors" poster.

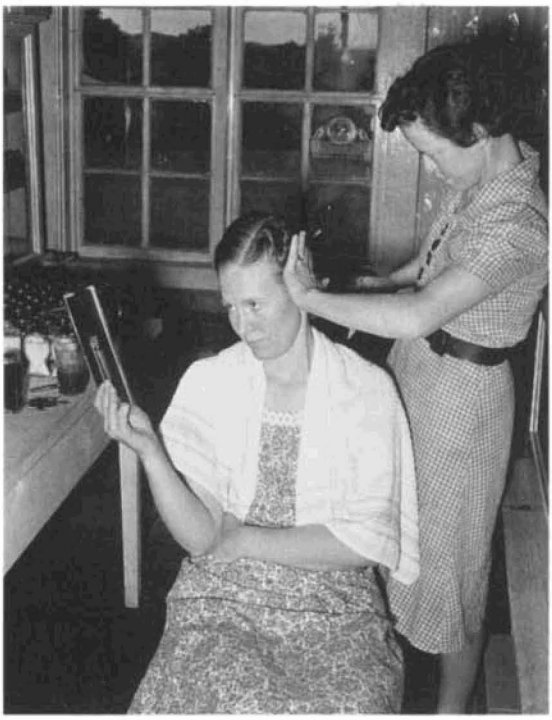
Consumer advocacy groups, physicians, and New Dealers began to lobby diligently for government regulation of the beauty industry in the aftermath of several well-publicized incidents of cosmetic poisoning and injury. In 1930, the American Medical Association reported that the depilatory Koremlu contained rat poison; three years later, Lash-Lure, an eyelash beautifier containing aniline dye, blinded and disfigured a young society woman from Dayton, Ohio. The "American Chamber of Horrors," an exhibit sponsored by the Food and Drug Administration and then turned into a book by Ruth Lamb, increased public awareness. The before-and-after makeover, normally a device to sell beauty preparations, here was used to unmask their dangers. Efforts to ban dangerous ingredients, register the content of products, and license beauticians succeeded in some states. Women's groups, organized under the umbrella Joint Women's Congressional Committee and

supported by Eleanor Roosevelt, pushed for passage of a federal law, enacted as the Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act of 1938. The Act was intended to make cosmetics safe for consumption by bringing them under the regulatory arm of the government.[68]

Significantly, activists in the consumer movement, except for the most radical, did not reject beautifying wholesale. Rather they distinguished between "honest cosmetics" and "criminal cosmetics," called for rational consumption, and promoted the state's interest in protecting its female citizens from harm. M. C. Phillips's *Skin Deep,* a 1934 exposé of the beauty industry that did much to whip up the demand for cosmetics regulation, reflected the temper of the times. Phillips denounced the "cosmetics racket" for selling illusions, and she claimed women's right, as voters and taxpayers, to safe, honest cosmetics. Women's clubs, YWCAs, labor unions, high schools, friends, and coworkers debated Phillips's revelations of cosmetic hazards and shams. "The girls in our office have been reading your book, 'Skin Deep,' with great interest," wrote Mabel Moats. After its publication, about 150 readers wrote to Phillips about beauty products and the cosmetics industry. Their letters still offer an occasion to ponder how hopes, anxieties, and prosaic pleasures converged upon jars of cream and boxes of powder.[69]

Some readers frankly questioned Phillips's credentials. Because Phillips had written under her initials instead of her given name, a few thought the author was in fact a man who had neither the understanding nor the authority to criticize cosmetics. Nelle Mordoff questioned the motives of Consumers' Research, the organization that had sponsored Phillips's work, and "wonder[ed] how any woman could have made" the critical conclusions of *Skin Deep.* "She could not have if she had ever had her face improved as I have had," she stated. "Is this Club composed entirely of men?"[70]

Many readers, however, took a different tack in letters of almost formulaic similarity. They thanked Phillips for guiding them down the righteous, and cheaper, path to beauty. They told of women's victimization by the cosmetics industry: They had been "suckers," spending un-



Migrant women in New Mexico fixing each other's hair in the absence of a beauty parlor.

necessarily large sums on worthless products. In the 1930s, women had many options for purchasing cosmetics, including inexpensive door-to-door products and ten-cent brands sold in variety stores. High-priced cosmetics sold in exclusive salons and department stores nevertheless enticed a number of middle- and working-class women. One *Skin Deep* reader observed that "women are actually frightened into buying" expensive preparations, then listed all the Charles of the Ritz products *she* had purchased: "I need not tell you that this adds up to more than a week's salary."[71]

They confessed their own self-delusions and gullibility. Phillips had confirmed "what I already knew down in my heart," Alice Breitenbach sadly wrote, "I've been deluding myself that certain cosmetics I have been using suited me." Some proudly repudiated their past in favor of consumer rationality. "Our family has thrown out jars of cosmetics and are buying the few which you recommend," wrote Mrs. Earl Kerwell.[72]

Then as if hearing a siren's call, women turned back to the beguiling world of beautifying, pouring out their hearts to Phillips, closely questioning her advice, revealing long lists of products they used. Although reading *Skin Deep* had caused them to "lose all confidence in cosmetics," women repeatedly asked Phillips for the name of a safe rouge, the formula for an expensive cream, an assessment of their beauty routines. Whatever the hyberbole of the cosmetics industry, admitted one woman, "there is no doubt that a wave and a little makeup helps a lot."[73]

Agnes Hoffman, a college graduate and teacher, was typical. Writing in the confessional style so common to women's discussions of cosmetics, she called herself "a nervous, high strung person, as are many school teachers." "I don't always keep regular hours and sometimes can't," she wrote. "I feel in general a mess." She used the expensive Arden line and had "spent money out of all proportion to my salary." "I don't really so much believe what saleswomen tell me as I hope that what they tell me will come true," she said ruefully, but *Skin Deep* had "quite shattered my illusions" about cosmetics. Still, in a lengthy postscript, she wrote question after question about complexion care.[74]

By the 1930s, makeup had become an aesthetic expression woven deeply into women's daily life, a life increasingly entwined with commodities, advertising, and mass media that promoted, in Charles Revson's famous phrase, "hope in a jar." Uttered with different inflections in the 1930s, those words could cynically capture the deepest disappointments of a consumer culture, or give voice to the utopian promise that cosmetic alchemy might transform deficiency into triumph.[75] But advertising was not the only—or the decisive—influence on women's cosmetics use. Its message was reinforced and refined in the workplace and in school, at home and at leisure, as women experienced growing pressure to adjust their looks to new norms of feminine appearance.

If women increasingly internalized a "regime" of scrutiny, assessment, and instruction, they did not simply copy the images they saw

In these banquet photographs, sorority sisters put on a glamorous, made-up look, while the Daughters of the American Revolution wear plain faces and suffer the camera. (Detail, Beta Chi Sorority, 17th Annual Banquet, 1935, and DAR Convention, April 1931, photographer Schutz. Courtesy George Eastman House.)

but adapted them to the requirements of their own lives. Some had begun to recognize that the discipline of appearances heightened their anxieties and undermined their self-confidence. Others discerned in beautifying new possibilities for play, self-portrayal, and participation in modernity. They took sensory delight in makeup, enjoyed the sociability it engendered, and lucidly perceived what appearances the labor market and social life demanded of them. Even when they proclaimed themselves dupes and victims of consumer culture, women did not renounce makeup, for it had become a common language of self-expression and self-understanding.