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Promoting the Made-Up Woman

The fashionable ideal has changed many times in recent decades, but the 1920s marked the moment when mass-produced images distinctly and powerfully began to influence female self-conceptions and beauty rituals. Glamorous screen stars, chic Parisiennes, aristocratic beauties, and breezy flappers all became familiar faces. Intended to dictate women's buying choices, these images derived their power from conscious design, visual resonance, and widespread circulation. They seemingly addressed all consumers, including, on occasion, women of disparate ethnic backgrounds. But the mass market's democratic vision of beauty denied African Americans entry. And while black and white manufacturers often mirrored each other in their business strategies, the images they created, and the ways women responded to them, diverged along racial lines.

White women were the audience for national advertising that tied beautifying to broad cultural concerns over female sexual mores and social roles. Like beauty culturists, mass marketers initially summoned women to proclaim their liberation from the fetters of the past by using cosmetics. In their effort to create beauty consumers out of a diverse

populace, advertisers drew upon an array of existing images representing modern womanhood—primarily socialites, actresses, coeds, sports-women, smartly dressed wives, and an occasional working woman or politician. But the range of these images, never all-encompassing, quickly narrowed and became more conventional. Having challenged an earlier regime of female respectability and moralism, advertisers came to advance what would become key tenets of normative femininity in the twentieth century. Ironically, a period that began with cosmetics signaling women's freedom and individuality ended in binding feminine identity to manufactured beauty, self-portrayal to acts of consumption.

The new mass-market cosmetics industry celebrated itself as both cause and consequence of women's modernity and emancipation. Victorian codes of morality and taste had constrained women in the nineteenth century, but now the "movement for personal freedom" licensed the systematic cultivation of beauty. One trade journal applauded Americans' dawning realization "that there is no sane connection between morals and cosmetics." Cosmetics were "merely symbols of the social revolution that has gone on; the spiritual and mental forces that women have used to break away from conventions and to forward the cause of women's freedom," explained beauty writer Nell Vinick.¹

These views had an appeal in the wake of campaigns for women's suffrage, higher education, and professional opportunities. Working-class women, long present in the labor force, had become newly visible within American society; so had middle-class wives who combined earning a wage and raising a family. While scientists debated whether women and men differed in intelligence and abilities, sexual theorists, feminists, and the avant garde acclaimed women's release from Victorian repression and espoused female self-expression and personal fulfillment. A variety of popular images pictured this "New Woman," from the mannish reformer, professional woman, and earnest labor activist, to the free-spirited outdoor girl and sexually assertive flapper.²

Yet for all the talk of social revolution and women's freedom, maga-

zines and newspapers of the 1920s reveal few attempts to generate alternative conceptions of beauty linked to American women's new economic and political roles. The cosmetics industry abjured depicting women in the public realm traditionally occupied by men—the workplace, meeting hall, and polling booth. Occasionally businesswomen and secretaries who "make their own way in the world" and needed to protect their "face value" were addressed. Some cosmetics firms advertised in the professional journals of educators, artists, and performers. In *Normal Instructor*, Armand advised teachers to guard against "schoolroom dust, and drying, aging 'chalk film.'" But such appeals were relatively few. The working women most in evidence were actresses, depicted not as hardworking professionals but as glamorous beauties.³

Some well-intentioned advertisers struggled to envision a New Woman that challenged popular clichés. For a number of women at J. Walter Thompson, both market research and feminism argued against stereotyping female consumers. Frances Maule, Thompson copywriter and a veteran of the women's movement, criticized advertisers for relying too much on "the good old conventional 'angel-idiot' conception of women" and urged them to remember the "old suffrage slogan—that 'Women Are People.'" She emphasized: "It is just as impossible to pick out a single feminine type and call it 'woman,' as it is to pick out a single masculine type and call it 'man.'" Maule identified four categories of female consumers, each responding to different appeals: housewives concerned with a well-stocked and well-run home, society women oriented to fashion and leisure, club women interested in the politics of consumption, and working women, "an ever-increasing class with an entirely different set of needs."⁴

This more nuanced view of women consumers occasionally surfaced in Thompson's cosmetics advertising. A beauty contest sponsored by Woodbury's dared to "disregard the conventional boundaries" and welcomed "every type of American women," including grandmothers and women workers. A series for Pond's in 1923, probably written by Maule, focused on women who "tax their skins." One ad pictured a working woman at a dance with the headline, "They were wrong when

they said, ‘She will lose her charm.’” Its copy reassured women who traded their home life for the “rush and worry of business” that femininity and professional success were compatible.⁵

Pond’s famous testimonial campaign reveals the limits of these efforts. In the early 1920s, Pond’s had lost sales to Elizabeth Arden and Helena Rubinstein. “Pond’s Creams through their very popularity were losing caste,” one market researcher reported; “women thought the higher priced creams must be better.” To change public perceptions, Thompson’s female copywriters seized upon an old, if threadbare, advertising technique to spotlight and applaud women of accomplishment.⁶

Alva Belmont appeared in Pond’s first testimonial, her cooperation secured through Frances Maule’s circle of feminist friends. Belmont was a well-known society woman who had championed suffrage and bankrolled the National Women’s Party. “Mrs. Belmont not only has given lavishly to women’s causes from her colossal fortune, has been and is a tremendous worker,” the Pond’s ad stated, “but also is particularly interested in woman’s special problem of how to keep her force and her charm throughout her whole life.” Belmont agreed to the celebrity interview but refused to allow her photograph to appear. In its place was a picture of her library, an incongruous image for the sale of a beauty preparation. Following Belmont were several other women active in the world of politics, although more in its social rounds than governing circles. Alice Roosevelt Longworth, Washington hostess and daughter of Theodore Roosevelt, and Mary McConnell Borah, wife of Senator William E. Borah, both endorsed Pond’s. Said Borah, “The Woman who cares about the dignity of her appearance—in the political life of Washington, on the plains of Idaho—looks to the smoothness, the firmness of her skin.”⁷

This singular effort to showcase distinguished and newsworthy women was undermined from the start, however, by the need to project an “image of status and prestige” in order to improve Pond’s rank relative to expensive treatment lines. Increasingly the ad agency turned to European aristocrats and American socialites whose celebrity derived simply from their wealth and standing. As staffers exploited their personal connections to

An Interview with Mrs. O.H.P. BELMONT on the care of the skin

"A woman who neglects her personal appearance loses half her influence. The wise care of one's body constructs the frame encircling our mentality, the ability of which insures the success of one's life. I advise a daily use of Pond's Two Creams."

Mrs. O. H. P. Belmont

I was in the beautiful great hall of Beacon Towers on Sand's Point, Port Washington, Long Island, that I first talked with Mrs. O. H. P. Belmont.

I was excited and eager for the interview because I knew that Mrs. Belmont not only has given lavishly to women's causes from her colossal fortune, has been and is a tremendous worker, but also is particularly interested in woman's special problem of how to keep her force and her charm throughout her whole life.

From all this I expected to meet a very commanding woman the day I visited Beacon Towers. But Mrs. Belmont, on the contrary, is quiet and gracious and sweet. She could not have been a more charming hostess.

She herself opened the grilled iron door and I stepped into the big hall with its impressive mural paintings of the life of Joan of Arc and its wide doors opening straight onto Long Island Sound.

Here, I felt instantly, is the spirit of beauty strengthened by sincerity.

After we had admired the glorious view she showed me the pictures of her two sons, and of her grandson, who will some day be one of England's dukes, and—very proudly—the latest snapshot of her very young Ladyship, a small great granddaughter.

"How fine textured and fresh her skin is," I thought. "And she has just acknowledged herself a great grandmother!"

Begs Women not to Neglect Themselves

"Now," she was saying, smilingly, "I suppose you want me to tell you what I think is the relation between a woman's success and her personal appearance."

"Yes," I admitted. "Just how important do you think personal appearance is?"

"It is vital. That is just as true for the woman at home or in business as for those whose socially prominent.

"A person may have great intelligence and yet make a very bad impression if her appearance is careless. So we do ourselves a great injustice if we do not give our bodies great care. It is very wise in every way to cultivate the knowledge of how to keep ourselves presentable and young."

"Don't you know," she said, "how often the woman with an unattractive face fails in the most reasonable undertaking? Nothing is so distressing. Neglect of one's personal attractions generally comes from ignorance and as I am greatly interested in the success of women in every possible way, I urge them not to neglect themselves."



The library of Mrs. O. H. P. BELMONT
at BEACON TOWERS on Long Island Sound,
where this interview was signed. Mrs. Belmont,
President of the National Woman's Party, is
known all over America for her active services in
securing the suffrage for women. Mrs. Belmont is
also interested in better conditions for women,
in the abolition of child labor, and for the
improvement of Children's Homes.

On the artistic side, she is a trained architect,
and her three magnificent residences—Villa Isolada
in France, the famous Marble House at Newport,
and the imposing country home Beacon Towers
on Long Island are the products of time not
devoted to politics and business. After years of
the burden of great public and private interests,
she has marvelously kept her freshness.



Pond's Two Creams
used by the women who must keep their
charm, their beauty, their influence
EVERY SKIN NEEDS THESE TWO CREAMS

Frenchwomen say, *Cleanse and Protect*

"YOU spend a part of each year in France," I said. "Are Frenchwomen more beautiful than American women?"

"Certainly not, but American women can learn from them. It comes naturally to them to care for their appearance from youth until they are eighty years old!—and they never lose their influence with society or the individual."

"Do Frenchwomen use creams much?" I asked Mrs. Belmont.

"In France," she said, "they have had this knowledge for generations. They have always used cleansing creams and protecting creams, knowing that water is not enough and that the face cannot stand much strain and exposure."

"Then you think women should use two creams?"

"I know they should. That is why I advise the daily use of Pond's Two Creams, so that women can keep their charm and influence as long as they need them—and that is always," she smiled.

Use this Famous Method

GIVE your skin these two indispensables to lasting skin loveliness—the kind of cleansing that restores each night your skin's essential suppleness, and the freshening that, besides protecting, brings each time the beauty of fresh smooth skin under your powder.

For years the laboratories of Pond's were devoted to the development of two preparations that were to meet these two vital needs. Finally two distinctly different face creams were perfected—Pond's Cold Cream and Pond's Vanishing Cream.

Every night—with the finger tips or a piece of moistened cotton, apply Pond's Cold Cream freely. The very fine oil in it is able to penetrate every pore of your skin. Leave a on a minute. Then remove it with a soft cloth. Dirt and excess oil, the rouge and powder you have used during the day, are taken off your skin and out of the pores. Feel how your face is relaxed. *Do this twice.* Now finish with ice rubbed over your face or a dash of cold water. Your skin looks fresh and is beautifully supple again. If your skin is very dry, pat on more cream, especially where wrinkles come first—around the eyes, the nose, the corners of your mouth—and leave it on over night.

After every cleansing, before you powder, and always before you go out—smooth on Pond's Vanishing Cream very evenly—just enough for your skin to absorb. Now if you wish, rouge—powder. How smooth and velvety your face feels to your hand. Nothing can roughen it. When you get up in the morning, after a dash of cold water, this cream will keep your skin fresh and untired for hours. And it will stay evenly powdered.

Use this method regularly. Soon your face will be permanently fresher, smoother and you can count on the charm of a fresh, young skin for years longer than would otherwise be possible. Begin now. Buy both Pond's Creams tonight in jars or tubes at any drug store or department store. The Pond's Extract Company.

GENERAL TUBES—MAIL THIS COUPON WITH 10¢ TODAY

The Pond's Extract Co.
101 Hudson St., New York

Ten cents (10¢) is enclosed for your special introductory tubes of the two creams every normal skin needs—enough of each cream for two weeks' ordinary toilet uses.

Name _____

Street _____

City _____ State _____

Compare the visual impact of these 1924 advertisements for Pond's.

Mrs. REGINALD VANDERBILT

"YOUTHFULNESS is the real pot of gold at the end of every woman's rainbow! Pond's Two Creams are a wonderfull help to this coveted end!"

REGINALD VANDERBILT

MY FIRST GLIMPSE of Mrs. Reginald Vanderbilt brought a little catch to my throat. I had heard she was very lovely—this young woman, barely twenty-one, two years married to the son of one of America's oldest, wealthiest, most distinguished families, and mother of an exquisite baby girl. But I was unprepared for beauty so compelling, so unique.

"It's partly because she's so tall," I said to my companion, "and so slender. Did you ever see such grace?"

Mrs. Vanderbilt is "brave" but with a difference. Her hair seems black until the sunlight breaks its shadows into shimmering bronze. In the depths of her dark eyes burn the fires of golden topazes. And in the snows of her delicate skin blooms the rose of her full-blown lips, ruby-red and strangely beautiful.

In spite of her extreme youth Mrs. Vanderbilt carries an air. She might have been born to the purple. For she has the poise and the *couth* of the woman who has lived her girlhood in the most distinguished society of Europe.

ALL these impressions flashed upon me. As Mrs. Vanderbilt moved toward me with a singing grace, I recalled what I had heard men say. "She dances—oh, divinely!"

"What a *bonheur* she lends that gown," I murmured. "The Parisian couturier who designed it must have thrilled to see its black velvet next arms and shoulders of such dazzling whiteness."

"But the contrast is in the color alone," said someone in our group. "When it comes to texture, there's little to choose between chiffon velvet and Mrs. Vanderbilt's skin."

Mrs. Vanderbilt spoke in a voice whose low modulations and finished diction come from fluency in three languages besides her own.

"It ought to be a good skin," she was saying. "I take good care of it."

"Of course," my friend rejoined. "No doubt you devote hours of every day to keeping it exquisite."

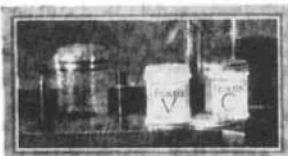
"On the contrary," cried Mrs. Vanderbilt, "only a few minutes—far less time than many of my friends. It's not the time that counts. It's the method!"

"Do tell us what your method is," we queried.



MRS. REGINALD C. VANDERBILT

in a black velvet gown by Vionnet. As Miss Gloria Morgan she spent her girlhood abroad. Since her marriage she has become a distinguished leader in the exclusive society of New York and Newport.



EVERY SKIN NEEDS THESE TWO CREAMS

"Two Creams," said Mrs. Vanderbilt. "One to cleanse the skin and keep it fresh and firm. The other to protect and give it that 'velvety' finish you've just spoken of. I've used Pond's Two Creams for a long time and have never found any better."

IT is this approval, given by the women of Society who must keep their youth and beauty—for Mrs. Vanderbilt is only one of many—that is the final proof of the sterling worth of Pond's Two Creams.

The first step in following the Pond's method of skin care is a deep, thorough cleansing with Pond's Cold Cream. Smooth it lavishly over your face, neck, arms and hands. Let it stay on a few moments so that its pure oils may sink deep down into the pores and soften the dust, soot, hardened excess oil, powder and rouge that choke them.

Wipe all the cream off and note the dirt it brings with it. Repeat the process. And now, to close the pores, dash your skin with cold water, or rub it lightly with a bit of ice.

This daily Pond's cleansing should follow any prolonged time spent out of doors. If your skin is inclined to be either very dry or too oily, you should use Pond's Cold Cream twice or more. And to overcome the dryness that forms lines and wrinkles, leave some of the cream on all night.

The second step in the Pond's Method of caring for the skin is a soft finish and protection with Pond's Vanishing Cream. Fluff just a light film over the skin of your face and hands. It will vanish—for Pond's Vanishing Cream is greaseless.

NOTICE now, how even the surface of your skin looks. The Vanishing Cream has leveled off all roughnesses. It gives you a lustre, too, a soft bright, clear tone.

And how much more smoothly your rouge and powder blend and how well they stay over this delicate foundation of Vanishing Cream. You need have no more fear of nose-shine, now.

You should always use Pond's Vanishing Cream before you powder, and with particular care before you go out. For it protects your skin so that wind, dust, sun and soot cannot rob it of its natural oils, its bloom of youth.

Follow the lead of Mrs. Reginald Vanderbilt. Buy your own Pond's Creams. Find out for yourself that what she says is wholly true. "They constitute as simple, as effectual a method of caring for the skin as has yet been discovered." You may have the Cold Cream in extra large jars now. And both creams in the smaller jars you are familiar with. The Pond's Extract Company.

FREE OFFER—Mail this coupon and we will send you free tubes of these two creams and an attractive little folder telling how to use them.

The Pond's Extract Company, Dept. E, 121 Hudson Street, New York City
Name.....
Street.....
City..... State.....

sign up the rich and famous, obtaining endorsements became something of a sport within the agency. When Queen Marie of Romania acquiesced, a Thompson executive rejoiced that “the securing of this testimonial was an achievement which astounded the advertising world.” The distinguished women also played the game, bidding up the price of their names. Quickly the campaign, with its parade of royals and debutantes, degenerated into parody. “Alice Roosevelt on Pond’s was so insincere,” complained one staffer, “I got the impression that she had no respect for the product.” Lady Margot Asquith’s unbecoming photograph, another griped, belied the ad’s headline “Woman’s Instinct to Make Herself Attractive.” More and more the agency turned to young, beautiful women. Thompson’s market research found that consumers preferred Princess Marie de Bourbon among the endorsers because “she is young and pretty and the photographs were romantic and sentimental.” Pictures of feminine beauty had trumped advertising copy that extolled women’s accomplishments.⁸

The Pond’s campaign suggests how fragile and circumscribed were efforts to imagine an alternative feminine appeal in beauty advertising. The limited presence of women in the advertising industry certainly played a part. But more important, the women who wrote cosmetics advertisements, even those who identified as feminists, found themselves caught in contradictory impulses. They recognized the variety of women’s experiences in modern society and celebrated women’s achievements. Caring for one’s appearance, they could claim, was part of a larger commitment to women’s social participation, self-expression, and dignity. But this view, a subtle and difficult argument to make, easily succumbed to the simpler notion of beauty as an end in itself. As advertising campaigns became conventionalized, the weak bond between female beauty and accomplishment dissolved.

If alternative visions of women’s beauty were not in evidence, the mass-market industry did challenge some codes of feminine appearance that had seemed fixed and unshakable in the nineteenth century. Formerly

distinct images of mother and daughter, leisured lady and wage earner, the decent and disreputable, now began to blur. In 1909, for instance, a Pompeian skin cream ad sentimentally depicted a venerable mother revered by her adult daughter, whose assurance, "You're All Right," referred not only to the mother's clear complexion but to her disposition. Fourteen years later, Pompeian portrayed a very different scene, of the modern mom inspected and approved by her family. "You're getting younger every day!" observed the daughter, and indeed, the 1923 mother had exactly the same face as her child. "Thanks to cosmetics," an industry analyst exulted, "the mother of today is more the big sister and enjoys and appreciates the pleasures of her daughters."⁹

Also transformed was the image of the painted woman, as alluring actresses wearing mascara and lipstick supplanted immoral kohl-eyed Jezebels. Theda Bara and other screen stars glamorized a painted look

Detail, Pompeian advertisement, Pictorial Review, 1923.



"Mother, you're looking younger every day!"



Maybelline advertisement in Pictorial Review, 1923.

tableaux of love and rejection, triumph and humiliation. As copywriter Edith Lewis explained, successful beauty advertising created "situations that bring strongly before the reader's imagination the social disadvantages of a bad complexion, the social incentives for a good one."¹¹

Indeed, cosmetics ads endlessly reminded women that they were on display, especially conspicuous in a world peopled by spectators and voyeurs: "Do you wonder, when you meet a casual friend, whether your nose is shiny? Do you anxiously consult store windows and vanity cases at every opportunity?" Even the most intimate moments—dressing in the boudoir, a kiss between lovers—were made visible to the magazine reader. Mirrors, movie cameras, and spectators placed in the ads underscored the idea that the eye constantly appraised women's appearance. Women were thus urged to transform the spectacle of themselves into self-conscious performances. "The woman in the

once associated with prostitution. Such firms as Maybelline increasingly turned to the movies for images that countered the prudish values of middle-class respectability. Close-up photographs of the female face, eyes darkened with makeup, projected a provocative but no longer sinful eroticism.¹⁰

Released from the Victorian underworld, painted women now paraded through advertisers' imaginary worlds. Scenes depicted them swimming, sunbathing, dancing, and motoring—pictures of healthy, athletic, and fun-loving womanhood. Paint no longer disqualified respectable women from romance or marriage. On the contrary, cosmetics figured prominently in everyday



Strangers' eyes, keen and critical –
can you meet them proudly - confidently -
without fear?

From a Woodbury's Soap advertisement, Ladies' Home Journal, 1922.



*Resinol Soap advertisement
in The Etude, 1918.*

home, the woman in business, in society, must make up for the part she is to play in life,” said beauty writer Virginia Lee. Armand advertisements concurred: “The great moments of your life are ‘close-ups.’ ”¹²

Challenging the older view of paint as a mask of deceit, the beauty industry promoted makeup as a tool for women to explore and portray their individuality in the modern world. As one cosmetic artist declared, “creative make-up will be the guide during the pilgrimage to the Holy Land of personality.” Along similar lines, Armand’s 1929 campaign, “Find Yourself,” offered to lead women to self-understanding by analyzing their appearance. The company distributed 250,000 copies of a booklet developed by a popular psychologist and a beauty expert. “The questions and answers will discover the real you—not as you think you are—but as others see you,” stated one ad.¹³

Makeup promised personal transformation, a pledge that sounded deeply in American culture—from conversion experiences and temperance oaths to the appeals of medicine men and faith healers. Beauty culturists had proclaimed the mutual transformation of external appearance and inner well-being. “Before-and-after” imagery appeared frequently in their works, as well as in the handbills and trade cards of patent cosmetics makers. But the mass-market cosmetics industry went one better, altering the terms of the physiognomic equation: In the coloring and contouring of facial surfaces, a woman could not only change her looks but remake herself and her life chances. When in 1936 *Mademoiselle* showed an ordinary reader, nurse Barbara Phillips, how to improve her appearance and featured her as the “Made Over Girl,” the metamorphosis known as the *makeover* was born.¹⁴

The makeover offered a pliable advertising concept to cosmetics firms at both the high and low ends of the market. In the 1910s Arden, Rubinstein, and others in the elite salon trade had advised their clients to emulate the fashionable Parisienne’s visible *maquillage* and so distinguish themselves from the *bourgeoise* who still scorned or concealed makeup. By 1919 importers and large domestic manufacturers were urging ordinary American women to imitate the lifestyles of the elite by buying powder and rouge. In cosmetics ads, compacts materialized at

*Zip advertisement,
from Toilet
Requisites, 1928.*

Saratoga Springs, the Paris Opera, and the races at Ascot. One observed, "Not all the users of La Dorine can be members of smart clubs but they are all eager to enjoy as much of the dainty refinement of the fashionable world as they can."¹⁵

Many mass-market firms advertised makeup as a leveler that broke down earlier class distinctions marking feminine appearance. "You can select ten ordinary girls from a factory and by the skillful use of such preparations as Kiija and proper toilet articles . . . you can in a short time make them as attractive and good-looking as most any ten wealthy society girls," a product brochure claimed. "It is not so much a matter of beauty with different classes of girls as it is how they are fixed up." A similar story appeared in a 1924 trade advertisement for Zip depilatory: A dark-skinned woman, with the appearance of an eastern or southern European immigrant, achieved social acceptance in America by ridding herself of superfluous hair.¹⁶

Beauty may have been considered the birthright of only wealthy or fortunate women in the nineteenth century, but cosmetics advertising sold the idea that an attractive appearance was an accomplishment all could easily achieve. Mail-order and tabloid-style ads promised cheap, instant beauty to working women unable to afford the time and money leisured women spent on beauty culture. “Quickly remake the complexion.” End freckles and wrinkles “with the ease that an eraser rubs off a pencil smudge.” “Now everyone can have” beauty clay, “formerly only available to the rich.” The scrapbook of copywriter Ruth Lamb, who later left advertising to become an outspoken advocate of cosmetics regulation, was filled with such claims. “Yesterday’s plain women are today smart-looking!” stated an Armand ad. “‘I am not good-looking,’ they say, ‘but I can look interesting!’ ”¹⁷

Cosmetics advertising qualified its utopian promises by containing personal realization within categories of physical beauty. “Individuality is the keynote,” Marinello announced, yet urged women to “develop your beauty type to its full charm.” In the “Find Yourself” advertising campaign, Armand helpfully provided a guide to “thirty-two quite distinct types of women” based on facial appearance. Sheba, Cleopatra, Cherie, and Lorelei all had different versions of “It,” as popular writer Elinor Glyn called the magnetic personality. But female individuality clearly had its limits: Except for hair style and color, the women’s faces were virtually indistinguishable.¹⁸

In Western literature and painting, the coloring of women’s hair, eyes, and complexion traditionally signified distinct female character types—the pale, flaxen-haired innocent, the dark, sensual “oriental,” the tubercular “celestial beauty” with a “crimson hectic flush” on her cheeks.¹⁹ Late-nineteenth-century cosmetics firms advertised their wares to reluctant Americans specifically through exotic images of American Indian, Egyptian, Turkish, and Japanese enchantresses as well as European belles. Reproductions of “Little Egypt,” whose dancing caused a furor at the 1893 Columbian Exposition, sold rouge and makeup, while Cleopatra



Detail, Armand advertisement, 1929.



An “exotic type” in a turn-of-the-century trade card. Murray and Lanham’s Florida Water.

ordinated makeup kits, and gave advice on appropriate cosmetics to consumers. Max Factor, for instance, promised an individual beauty diagnosis to each consumer, then instructed retailers how to make “personal” recommendations based on hair and skin types.²¹

The identification of facial types also offered a means of perceiving and classifying the dizzying array of complexions in a nation of immigrants. Armand’s Sheba, Cleopatra, and other “alluring types” were euphemisms for ethnicity, identities defined as exotic looks. Addressing white women with olive or tawny complexions, one Armand ad suggested that “a dark skin may be your greatest attraction—you may be hiding it with a light powder.”²² Some companies advertised directly to ethnic communities, using the foreign language press, posters in immigrant neighborhoods, and local promotions. Carl Weeks marketed his goods among eastern and southern European immigrants, advertising, for exam-

was virtually a cult figure. At the same time, theatrical makeup practices codified a variety of ethnic character types; one manual explained how to appear Italian by applying dark, moist rouge and olive powder. Even the names of theatrical makeup used ethnic signifiers, such as Stein’s Mexicola rouge and Hess’s Indi-anola paste.²⁰

Modern marketing strategies built on these older iconographic conventions. Beauty types offered a formula for classifying products, consumers, and information. With eye and hair color or skin tone as guides, manufacturers developed complementary color palettes, designed coordi-

ple, in the *Jewish Daily Forward*. Max Factor promoted Society makeup to Latinas in Southern California with ads in the Spanish-language paper, *La Opinion*. One in 1928, featuring the actors Lupe Velez and Ramon Navarro, advertised a “dance of the Stars.” “Come as you like,” it invited, “in street clothes, the clothes of your dreams, or traditional Mexican or Hispanic garb.” Velez also appeared in Factor’s English language ads; she had achieved stardom in Mexico and the United States, typecast as the dark-haired Spanish beauty, tempestuous and passionate. Women were even encouraged to play with their looks; ethnicity, defined as style, could, like makeup, be easily applied and washed off. Factor’s color harmony charts included makeup instructions for “Spanish types.” The wrong lipstick and rouge could ruin a brunette’s beauty, an Armand ad stated, but “make her lips like pomegranates, her skin like pale ivory—she’s Oriental, different and striking.”²³

Defining the face of America in light of its mixed population absorbed the cosmetics industry. “It is quite possible here in the United States to join a Nordic skin to Italian hair and eyes, to color an English skin with a warmth of Spanish, Jewish, or Russian blood,” stated advice writer Helen Macfadden. “That’s America, where for three hundred years we have been blending all the recognized types and producing the most fascinating new ones!” A makeup artist agreed: “Your face . . . is the story of the blending and merging of many peoples into one people.”²⁴

The melting pot of beauty types in advertising accepted Eastern European, Italian, and even Latina women, but excluded African Americans. Underlying the celebration of ethnic variety was the belief that the true American face was still a white face. Mass marketers consciously avoided black imagery in beauty advertising; in 1936, when Armand changed its trademarked silhouette of a woman’s head from “solid black” to light gray, one trade journal believed it would “win new popularity for Armand beauty products among the white women of the South.”²⁵

Bleach creams continued to be marketed to white women well into the twentieth century; J. Walter Thompson compiled a list of 232 of them for sale in 1930. Advertisers used traditional appeals to gentility, social



Nadine advertisement, 1924.

for manufacturer Albert F. Wood: “A white person objects to a swarthy brown-hued or mulatto-like skin, therefore if staying much out of doors use regularly Satin Skin Vanishing Greaseless Cream to keep the skin normally white.”²⁶

Nevertheless, many white women began to consider a tan acceptable as sports and outdoor recreation grew popular. By the mid-1920s, sun-tanning had turned into a craze. This widespread desire for dark and darker skin challenged the cosmetics industry’s basic assumption—that good skin was light skin—and many firms were slow to respond to the vogue. Although a few produced “sunburn” tints in the early 1920s, it was not until the end of the decade that tanning lotions and darker face powders were generally available. By 1929, the industry insisted that women “must buy everything from hat to shoes to match the shade of tan she has just purchased.”²⁷

Allusions to “health, Palm Beach or Deauville” were used to sell

climbing, and Anglo-Saxon superiority. Dorothy Dignam’s ads for Nadinola skin bleach and Nadine face powder, appearing in mass-circulation women’s magazines, resurrected the Old South. Dignam later noted, “This line made in the South was largely sold to the Negro market; the advertising was a planned attempt to capture the white market also. I was never told!” Her paean to “the beauty secret of Southern women,” featuring plantations, magnolia blossoms, and hoop-skirted belles, erased any hint of Nadinola’s black clientele. Although usually rendered obliquely, racial prejudice was an explicit talking point

tanning products, but the sales pitch often slipped into the language of race. “Lily white complexion is ‘passé,’” claimed Tre-Jur, and the trade press buzzed with news of “Nubian hues,” “Indian-hued maidens,” and “dusky skins.” Dark skin as fashion, however, only reinforced perceptions of racial difference. The “right shade of tan has become so smart,” a beauty expert advised, but once autumn arrived, “it is high time we returned to our natural selves” by bleaching the skin. If the “idea of a complete change of complexion” reflected women’s innate desire for novelty and style, said another, “underneath their tawny exteriors the roses and lilies bloomed undisturbed.”²⁸

The mass-market cosmetics industry recognized the heterogeneity of white American women and dismissed the profound differences among them with the reassurance that assimilation was largely a matter of aesthetics. White women, along with Tre-Jur, could confidently declare that lily white complexion was “passé”—that skin tone was a matter of fashion, that a dark complexion was one choice among many—as long as the boundary between black and white was secure. It took the African-American press to expose the easy coexistence of the tanning aesthetic and white supremacy. At an Asbury Park resort, “Life-guards, burnt so dark that they were eligible for the jim-crow car, were the envy, particularly of the women,” the *Messenger* pointedly commented. “In the meantime the Negroes were huddled into a corner of the beach between two buildings that shut off the view like the blinders on a horse.”²⁹

The painted face had suddenly become a sign of the times. By the 1930s, how-to manuals and product inserts gave detailed instructions on contouring and coloring with new foundation creams, lipstick, and eye shadow. Women could easily learn the “Hollywood trick of dramatizing, heightening, and accenting” facial features, wrote one beauty expert. What had once been denounced as paint was now celebrated as *glamour*, “one of the thrill words of this decade.” As a makeup artist proclaimed, “We can literally manufacture” facial glamour “right out of



"The invisible mask."
Detail, DeMeridor advertisement, 1926.

the paint-pot." At the same time, the painted woman continued to haunt cosmetics producers and promoters. If no longer the mark of the prostitute, too much makeup still implied female coarseness, promiscuity, and low social standing. Advice writers repeated the mantra that makeup should "make you look *naturally* more attractive—not artificial, nor obviously painted." Fearing a backlash, the trade press even tried to galvanize store clerks to advise customers not to use too much face powder—an effort that quickly failed.³⁰

To make the mask invisible involved not just creating a natural look, but training the eye to perceive makeup as a natural feature of women's faces. The *Hollywood Mirror* contrasted the glamour of Garbo unfavorably to the charm of Janet Gaynor, a woman-next-door who

METROPOLITAN MOVIES

Trade Mark Reg. U. S. Pat. Off.



Cartoonist's view of natural beauty, Toilet Requisites, 1928.

INNOCENT
YET MEN TALKED UNTIL...

New Beauty Secret
made her look
more Natural!

HER name is a secret. But her story isn't. She's wealthy . . . well-educated. Yet men once questioned her good taste. They said her painted lips were artificial-looking . . . unnatural. Luckily, she found the one lipstick that gives natural-looking color . . . without a trace of paint!

Detail, Tangee advertisement, in Ladies' Home Journal, 1933.

declared lipstick natural. Beauty editor Dorothy Cocks did not object to "having your lip paste show, provided it shows an effort on your part to have it match the natural tone of your own coloring." Tangee actually looked orange in the tube but harmonized with lip color when applied; advertisements invited consumers to "make up your LIPS for KISSES!" and featured women with bright bow lips and dots of rouge, yet insisted the lipstick "can't make you look painted . . . it isn't paint." One ad pronounced a woman "innocent yet men talked"; her lipstick marked her as cheap and vulgar until she tried Tangee. Tying lipstick to sex, advertisers and advice writers acknowledged female eros yet guided it

needed "no artificial aid to hold a man's attention." It stressed that "cleanliness, correct cosmetics used with reserve, keeping one's hair well groomed . . . are the fundamentals." Even Max Factor, whose makeup was most closely associated with Hollywood glamour, described the "magic of make-up" to be an illusionism that made it "impossible for anyone to detect [where] the Make-Up begins or ends." But looking natural, like looking glamorous, now required a box full of beauty devices: foundation or vanishing cream, powder, rouge, lipstick, and for some, eyebrow pencil, mascara and eye shadow.³¹

The use of lipstick proved especially troubling. Considered the most artificial cosmetic in everyday use, it connoted the come-on, a sexually assertive, public pose that trifled with bourgeois conventions. Against the eye's perception, the industry

safely toward heterosexual romance and marriage. Vivid red lips impeded the fulfillment of those natural desires, a beauty writer warned: “You cannot afford to make yourself ridiculous if you have started for success, or you want to attract a REAL man.”³²

Applying makeup in public was also highly charged because it exposed the artifice behind the illusion, the backstage of women’s performance. Advice columns and beauty manuals often editorialized against public primping in the 1920s. Powdering in restaurants or shops “stamps you as having poor breeding,” noted one authority. Some manufacturers tried to calm women’s fears about making a spectacle of themselves; Colgate offered a thin watchcase compact that “nestles into your hand so inconspicuously that you can use it anywhere without being noticed.” Gradually beauty experts became more equivocal, and then stopped objecting to makeup “repairs” and “face-fixing” altogether. As *Vogue* proclaimed, putting on lipstick had become one of the “gestures of the twentieth century.”³³

Once makeup became widely accepted, advertisers and beauty experts regulated its use by trafficking in subtle distinctions. Coloring the eyelids and beading lashes were fun in the evening but bad taste in daylight; acceptable for adults but not for girls under eighteen; lovely on the dance floor but not in the office. “If you *must* be exotic, wait till after dark,” instructed columnist Bernice Peck. Writers advised women not to wear movie makeup on the street—too colorful and showy—and warned against runny mascara and lipstick that came off on men’s collars and on napkins. Delineating appropriate makeup based on time of day, activity, age, and circumstances became a commonplace of beauty reporting, crucial to the cycle of fashion, products, and news that propels women’s magazines today.³⁴

Advertisers set out to change the way women viewed their external appearance. To do so, they drew on new perceptions of the inner self beholden to psychology and psychiatry. In the 1930s, an explicitly therapeutic language began to pervade cosmetics promotions. It was not simply that makeup could “make us look and feel more self-possessed, poised, and efficient,” as one beauty editor put it. Rather,

women's mental health and feminine development depended on continually embracing new looks and beauty products. When any woman "begins to regard her appearance in her own mind as a fixed, unalterable quantity—that same moment, some vital, shining part of her is extinguished forever," said *Vogue's Book of Beauty* in 1933. A woman who fails to update her looks, it went on, "destroys those potential personalities that psychologists tell us are lurking behind our ordinary selves." Psychoanalytic terms began to course through the trade press. Those "who are conscious of their poor appearance" suffered from an inferiority complex, one psychiatrist judged. But help was literally at hand, industry spokesman Everett McDonough promised, for "many a neurotic case has been cured with the deft application of a lipstick."³⁵

As an advertising medium that stressed storytelling over visual information, radio was particularly suited to communicate a message focused on the psychology of beauty. In a 1930 commercial for Ingram's Milkweed Cream, for instance, beauty expert "Frances Ingram" read a letter from a saleswoman passed over for promotion in a large Detroit department store. Criticized for lacking efficiency and personality, she resigned from her job: "It's the unfairest thing I ever heard of. But since listening to you, I've been wondering if maybe my appearance affected my chance of promotion." Ingram briskly observed that in this "age of self-development," women must cultivate their health and "internal cleanliness," acquire a "radiant, attractive, and likeable" personality, and attend to external appearance. "When a woman has a bad complexion, people notice it immediately, and they have to get past it before they really like that person," she diagnosed. "I believe that the dullness of your complexion may have reacted on your subconscious in such a way that your confidence in yourself has become impaired."³⁶

The appeal to naturalism and psychology effaced differences among women, and it reinforced the notion that all women share identical desires. The great variety of female lives and looks were increasingly distilled into pure images of women who revealed nothing but their beauty. Elizabeth Arden's famous ad of a beautiful, anonymous head wrapped in a towel offered a quasi-religious motif—the laying on



ARTISTER

USE *Elizabeth Arden's* *Preparations*

under her personal direction
And be assured of the clear loveliness of your skin

WHEN you use Elizabeth Arden's Preparations according to the methods carefully evolved by Miss Arden herself, the health and clear beauty of your skin are as assured as if you were working under Miss Arden's personal supervision. Every Preparation has been personally planned by Miss Arden for a definite purpose — for a particular type of skin. Every treatment has first of all been perfected, step by step, by Miss Arden's own skillful fingers. To secure the very best results be sure always to use every cream, lotion or tonic exactly as intended. Cleanse with *Venetian Cleaning Cream*, whose milking purity penetrates every last little pore. Wake up your sleepy tissues, give them new zest with *Skin Tonic*, or if they are unusually sluggish, brace and invigorate them with *Special Astringent*. Smooth away every tiny roughness with *Velvety Cream*. Fill out depressing hollows and weary lines with *Orange Skin Food*.

*Two versions of
"Everywoman."*

Top: *Elizabeth Arden advertisement, 1928.*

Right: *Detail, Lady Esther advertisement, from Pictorial Review, 1933.*

PARALYZED PORES

TRUE CAUSE OF
DRY OR OILY SKIN
ENLARGED PORES
AND BLACKHEADS

HER PORES SAY

I CAN'T BREATHE!

I'M SUFFOCATING!

MAKE THIS TELLING TEST!

RUB your finger tips over your face. Press firmly. Give particular attention to your chin, forehead, around your mouth, and the little crevices beside your nose. Now! Is your skin absolutely smooth? Or do you feel tiny bumps and rough patches? If you do, you have Paralyzed Pores.

of hands—that brilliantly symbolized the universality of Arden's service. In a similar vein, Tre-Jur developed a series of ads called the "Unknown Beauty." "Everywoman" pervaded Depression-era cosmetics marketing; ads were filled with ordinary women who looked for beauty at good prices and shared their worries about "paralyzed pores," "cosmetic skin," and other complexion problems fabricated in the world of advertising.³⁷

In little more than a decade, an aesthetic of women's freedom and modernity had narrowed and turned in upon itself. *Vogue* could claim without irony that bright fingernails offered "a minor adventure" and a facial "doesn't stop at giving you a new face—it gives you a whole new point of view on life." What had once been seen as women's vices—vanity, deceit, desire—were now signs of a "normal mind." Beauty manuals and women's magazines urged women to encourage narcissism in their daughters to make them care about their looks. Asserting women's "right to ROMANCE!" advertisements offered cosmetics as talismans and weapons in the proper pursuit of men and marriage. "Most men are like babies," stated one beauty guide, and women should use cosmetics to manipulate them—discreetly. As "the one topic that every woman has in common with her sister," claimed McDonough in 1937, cosmetics even "spread democracy." In that democracy, goods knitted together a female polity, yet limited choice, rights, and participation to acts of beautifying and consumption.³⁸

As the cosmetics trade sought to reach new consumers, there remained one boundary some contemplated crossing. "Will he-men ever be a good market?" wondered industry researchers in 1936. It seemed unlikely. Of two hundred white-collar New Yorkers queried, one in two used an aftershave talc or lotion, but most eschewed scents and tints. More than half disliked fragrances as too "sissified," offensive, or causing unfavorable comment. The problem, researchers concluded, was the belief that cosmetics were effeminate. "The man who shuns after-shave talcum in the daytime," they noted, "would use it if he thought it

would add to, not endanger, his reputation as a 'regular' guy."³⁹

That reputation had been long in the making. Just as women who used cosmetics had to contend with the image of the painted hussy, so men interested in beautifying had to defend themselves against insinuations of frivolity, weakness, and homosexuality.

The late-nineteenth-century "cult of manliness" offered an emphatic ideal of male toughness and vitality, visible in the mania for football and boxing, the adulation of the cowboy, and the militarism of Teddy Roosevelt's Rough Riders. Men who cared too much for their appearance were perceived to be weak and womanish. The rise of the New Woman was greeted with reactionary poems and cartoons of severe, powerful women served by dainty, painted men. Upper-class fops and "exquisites" wearing rouge and eyebrow pencil, slick-haired salesmen, scented black dandies, and homosexual "fairies" flourishing powder puffs were all stock figures in popular culture. Male cosmetics use registered disorder in the regime of masculinity.⁴⁰

These images had some basis in reality, as different male subcultures adopted a more fastidious and enhanced appearance. At the turn of the century, the use of hair and shaving products was widespread, and men of wealth, especially bachelors, conveyed a sense of sophistication and urbanity with the addition of aftershave powder or cologne. Some black and white working-class men had long put on a stylish parody of the man about town. Most important, male homosexual commu-



Oscar Wilde advertises women's beauty preparations. Neilson's *Secret for the Complexion* trade card.

nities became increasingly visible in large cities, and as historian George Chauncey explains, the emergent gay cultural style used appearance to signal sexual identity. Significantly, the rouged lips and eye shadow of so-called “painted queens” and “fairies” reflected the makeup styles more of prostitutes and lower-class women than of middle-class ladies. Most gay men did not choose such overt display—typically those who did were young, working-class men with little reputation to protect—but discreet middle-class homosexuals might on occasion use cologne or subtle makeup.⁴¹

Scattered evidence of men’s wary flirtation with cosmetics appears throughout the historical record. Beauty culturists often remarked on how men in the public eye—politicians, actors, salesmen—sought facials and skin treatments. Men visited Madame Velaro’s studio in the 1880s to have wrinkles removed and mustaches tinted; decades later, Helena Rubinstein and Elizabeth Arden reported similar forays and sporadically marketed male beauty products and services. At large urban barbershops, *Fortune* noted in 1937, the male visitor received “much the same treatment he might get in the beauty parlor shops, and without seeming faery (except perhaps to the barber).”⁴²

Some men covertly used cosmetics, doing “things to their faces in the privacy of their bathrooms which they might not admit to at a teamsters’ picnic.” They applied their wives’ Pompeian night cream in the morning when shaving; they ordered Vauv, a vanishing cream advertised only to women, to remove shine; they raided their wives’ cosmetic cases for Covermark to hide blemishes. A business writer described a “successful salesman (and he’s a ‘HE-MAN’) who carries a very small makeup kit with him” and used eyeliner “to enhance impression.” A middle-class woman told how her teenage son used Pond’s for blackheads: “Keeps it down in his drawer where nobody will see and tease him about it.” When men “come to the cosmetics counter and demand ‘just powder,’ ” observed a druggist, they want “face powder, and the wise clerk will assume as much and ask no questions.”⁴³ Some commentators in the 1920s prophesied that women’s cosmetic practices would eventually extend to men. “Effeminacy does not mean what it

used to mean," said the *Spokane Review* in 1925. "What is going on is the gradual drawing together of the sexes on the common ground of mutual custom." Noting the high salaries paid to handsome male movie stars, it speculated that men might wear eyebrow pencil and lipstick in the future, as appearance became increasingly important to success. But given men's embarrassment and discomfort, transforming idiosyncratic private behavior into publicly acknowledged and accepted practices remained a daunting task.⁴⁴

A genuine opening for men's toiletries came when men first embraced self-shaving. Playing on fears of germs spread in public barbershops, manufacturers promoted the hygiene, privacy, and thrift of the safety razor. They appealed as well to dominant notions of middle-class masculinity: The self-shaver was a self-starter. Gillette, the leader of the industry, glamorized baseball players, soldiers, and young businessmen. "The Gillette is typical of the American spirit," claimed a 1910 ad in the ringing tones of Andrew Carnegie and Horatio Alger. "Its use starts habits of energy—of initiative. And men who *do* for

Gillette advertisement, 1910.



The men who uphold the standards of American sport today are clean men—clean of action and clean of face. Your baseball star takes thought of his personal appearance—it's a part of his team ethics. He starts the day with a clean shave—and, like all self-reliant men, he shaves himself.

Wagner, Jennings, Kling, Donovan, Chance—each of the headliners owns a Gillette Safety Razor and *uses it*. The Gillette is typical of the American spirit. It is used by capitalists, professional men, business men—by men of action all over this country—*three million of them*.

Its use starts habits of energy—of initiative. And men who *do* for themselves are men who *think* for themselves. Be master of your own time. Buy a Gillette and use it. You can shave with it the first time you try. The only perfectly *safe* razor and the only safety razor that shaves on the correct hollow ground shaving principle. No strapping, no honing.

Send your name, a post card for our new Basball Book—Schedule of all League games, batting records—28 pages of interesting facts and figures. Every fan should have it. It is free.

King C. Gillette

GILLETTE SALES COMPANY, 80 W. Second Street, Boston
New York, Times Building Chicago, Stock Exchange Building
London, Stock Exchange Building
Edinburgh, Safety Razor, Ltd., London
Edinburgh, British, Montreal, Liverpool, Berlin, Paris
Frasers, Officer, Shanghai, China
Canadian Office, 42 St. Alexander Street, Montreal

J. B. Williams advertisement, from American Magazine, 1928.

We have our Caste Marks, too

India . . . teeming land of polygots . . . points a man's place upon his face.

In America . . . also . . . by the face of a man we judge his class and worth.

Clean, healthy skins make fine and lasting impressions. We greet with pleasure Faces that are FIT.

For this Face Fitness, turn to Williams eight-eighth "year of specialized study of what is best for beard and skin have brought unquestioned authority.

Keen and comprehending men begin the day with a rich face blanket of Williams lather,—softening, soothing, supremely mild.

Then they protect the newly shaven skin, condition it for the day, with a generous tinging wash of Aqua Velva. For Aqua Velva keeps the skin as Williams keeps the face.

Just notice the fine skins of the men who use Williams!

Williams
SHAVING CREAM --- AQUA VELVA

Williams Shaving Cream—Absolutely pure, absolutely unscented. Super mild. It softens and removes hair. Thoroughly prepares the skin, leaving clean, soft, smooth, fresh, facial tissues. When shaving quick and comfortable.

"Oh, yes . . . sometimes they change . . . for all that comes back in Williams!"

Williams Aqua Velva—Made expressly for after shave. It relieves the skin, soaks and tones it. Prevents chafing, dust, germs, wind and sunburn. Protects, softens, prevents skin ticks and lice. Contains the skin's natural moisture and by keeping it moist helps to keep it young.

Williams Shaving Cream and Aqua Velva are sold in all drug stores and leading retail stores.

Address, Dept. A-18-18 E. 23rd St., New York, N. Y., or to J. B. Williams Co., Cheltenham, Pa., or to J. B. Williams Co., Montreal, Quebec.

themselves are men who *think* for themselves.” Manufacturers of shaving supplies invoked good grooming as an entrée into the new corporate economy, the means by which men created their own references. The erosion of local, family-centered businesses and the growth of national commercial networks, corporate industry, and a new professional and managerial class had made questions of probity and loyalty a growing concern. How could businessmen read character in the faces of unfamiliar job applicants or potential partners? Toilet-goods companies answered, “A good face is the best letter of introduction.”⁴⁵

Razor manufacturers also used exotic types, albeit in different ways than cosmetic firms selling to women. Seeking to dispel the association of toiletries with effeminacy, an advertisement for Curley’s Easy-Shaving Safety Razor claimed that “the first Roman to shave every day

was no fop, but Scipio, conquerer of Africa.” J. B. Williams compared the “caste marks” of Indian men to the clean-shaven American face. Ironically, these references to the foreign “other” made it more difficult to convince American men to use cosmetics; as one trade analyst put it, toiletries “prepared exclusively for men simply couldn’t get by their Anglo-Saxon prejudices.”⁴⁶

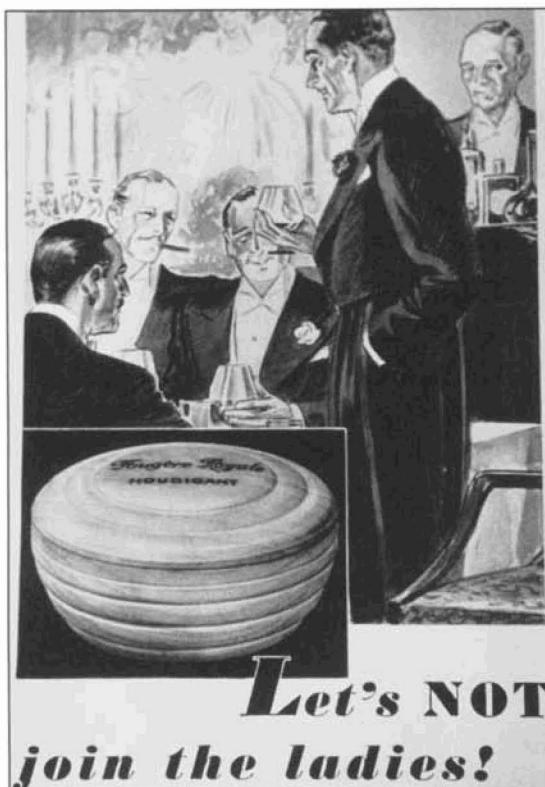
While razors and shaving soap became a big business, other toiletries remained difficult to sell. Ads for complexion clay or massage cream occasionally addressed both sexes using different appeals: Pompeian cream “beautifies and youthifies” women but enabled men to “win success” and “make [their] own promotion easier” in the business world. More commonly firms classified the products themselves either as women’s cosmetics or men’s toilet goods. In the late nineteenth century, distributors had sold *mascaro* as an all-purpose dye, useful in touching up gray hair at the temples and darkening eyebrows and lashes; by World War I the product had become *mascara*, an eyelash beautifier for women only. Even when presented with evidence of male demand, firms selling women’s beauty wares failed to take advantage. Ads for Cutex manicure preparations in 1918 included keyed coupons for free samples to test the popularity of different appeals; 10 percent of the inquiries came from men but were deliberately discarded.⁴⁷

Having successfully promoted cosmetics use as a natural facet of womanhood, in the 1920s and 1930s the industry labored to cast an aura of masculinity around men’s preparations, adopting trademarks, packaging, advertising, and merchandising methods that expunged the feminine. The trade journal *Toilet Requisites* urged retailers to push goods “for men only” by writing ads in men’s language, teaching clerks about male buying habits, and creating single-sex boutiques to ease male anxiety. Any evidence of manly grooming was cheered: “Toiletries Effeminate?—Ask the Navy!” Unable to overcome its prejudices, however, the journal continually undermined its own efforts: “It is bootless to argue or advertise the fact that men should have recourse to toiletries in the manner of women. Some do, but, thank Heaven, they form but a meagre company.”⁴⁸

Several firms set out to sell face powder to men under the guise of tinted talcum or aftershave powders. The Mennen Company, for example, marketed a Talcum for Men, to be used after shaving: This had a light tint, and despite differences in name and packaging, bore a close resemblance to loose face powder for women. Although the product did well, William Mennen, Jr., remembered that when it was introduced, “the company used to get a lot of bitter mail saying that we were trying to turn men into women.” One manufacturer marketed powder puffs in rubber sacks, which could be concealed in the breast pocket of men’s jackets. Another made a mitt-shaped Talc-Pad for men’s shaving kits and proclaimed hopefully, “Now it’s man’s turn to be emancipated.”⁴⁹

Carl Weeks made the most ambitious attempt to render cosmetics masculine. Apparently male powder users often bought Armand because it was heavy and adherent enough to cover beard stubble. Weeks began thinking about a men’s powder as early as 1925, “not a talc to sell to men, but a real face powder made to go on men’s faces easily to make them look better.” In 1929 Weeks finally launched Florian, a line of men’s toiletries that included skin lotion, face powder, and moisturizer. He believed that “men were beginning to realize that, if their faces are smooth and clean, their hair neat, their clothes pressed, and their shoes shined, they gain a sense of well being that is worth money.” In the face of much skepticism, Weeks forged ahead. When journalist Charles Muller, swallowing hard, wrote to inquire, “Will appeal be that of health or—I hesitate—beauty?” Weeks nonchalantly (and ambiguously) noted in the letter’s margin “sure.”⁵⁰

To detach Florian from any taint of the feminine, Weeks spurned French trade names, floral designs, and pastel colors. Florian’s red and black containers with zigzag lettering presented snappy and cartoonish trade names, such as Brisk, Dash, Vim, Keen, Zest, and Smooth. Weeks advised druggists to place the line at cigar counters and mount displays featuring boxing gloves, pipes, dice, and footballs. “You will put over the idea that the *mascu-line* is all *stag*,” he enthused. “It’s for he-men with no women welcome nohow.” To create brand recognition and demand, he distributed free samples where men congregated, at



Detail, Houbigant advertisement for Fougere Royale aftershave, from Esquire, 1934.

colleges, rotary clubs, fire and police stations, banks, and factories. Still, Weeks's "he-man proposition" could not disguise the fact that men were being asked to adopt female beauty practices. Florian salesmen showed dealers "that slick way of mixing Zest and Smooth so that it powders and stays on and doesn't show," but the products and instructions differed little from Armand's vanishing cream and complexion powder for women.⁵¹

Although the onset of the Depression made the launch of Florian a classic case of bad timing, few manufacturers were successful in promoting even the most limited line of men's skin-care cosmetics, let alone makeup. *Fortune* and *Esquire* ran relatively few toiletry ads in the 1930s, although sales of aftershaves and scented products did rise after 1935. J. B. William's Aqua Velva dominated the mass market for

aftershave using a direct and practical appeal—"feels great on your face," "peps up your appearance." In contrast, an elite brand like Houbigant's Fougere Royale offered a "stimulating cocktail for the face" and featured tuxedoed men lingering over postprandial brandies, declaring "Let's NOT join the ladies." The image was sexually ambiguous, potentially viewed as a scene of gay bonhomie, but it drew a clear line between male and female consumption.⁵² When it came to cosmetics, most men did not join the ladies. Cosmetics were not readily reconciled with a heterosexual masculine identity.

In the 1920s and 1930s, cosmetics producers, advertisers, and beauty experts shifted the burden of female identity from an interior self to a personality made manifest by marking and coloring the face: Makeup was a true expression of feminine identity, not its false mask, and the makeover was a means of individual self-development. Marketers underwrote consumers' belief in their own modernity, an endorsement that potentially opened a space for women's individuality, social participation, and public presence. Yet that female space, in the imagination of advertisers and advice writers, quickly became an animated world of romantic interludes, leisure activities, social encounters, and narcissistic pleasure, all occurring through commercial exchange. Cosmetics marketing intensified gender distinctions—especially in failed attempts to sell cosmetics to men—even as it acknowledged, in oblique ways, the social changes affecting women's lives. Through powerful beauty images, makeup's aesthetic wedded women's modernity and individuality to a normative female identity. In his "Cosmetic Laws," Carl Weeks wrote that cosmetics must render each woman "entirely herself," yet must express the "glorification of divine femininity."⁵³ Such incongruity and paradox were not incidental by-products but governing axioms in the mass market for beauty.