

Ladies, Lipstick, and Liberty:  
Beauty Trends Within Women's Social Movements in 1960s America

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HIST4100: 1960s America

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May 2, 2016

One could tell where a woman stood in the dense atmosphere of change in the 1960s based on her makeup. The array of beauty trends that arose in the 1960s “mirrored more radical conflicts over sexuality, social life, and politics.”<sup>1</sup> Throughout the decade, women wore their politics on their faces as certain makeup trends reflected different political and social ideologies. What teenagers wanted to achieve with their makeup was drastically different from the feminists’ goal of natural beauty. African American women employed cosmetics to make statements about inclusiveness, and conservative women used makeup to maintain beauty standards set in the fifties. Makeup was used as a symbol of female empowerment during this crucial turning point in American history. The beauty standards of the forties and fifties completely transformed in the sixties due to the rise of youth culture, Civil Rights, Women’s Rights, and the conservatism. The movements of the sixties influenced cosmetic trends, creating a rapid diversification of beauty standards unseen in previous decades.

Makeup trends in the forties and fifties emphasized patriotism, sexuality and conformity. During World War II, makeup was intended to make women feel strong and patriotic. The staple bright red lipstick trend was a symbol of patriotism and feminine strength.<sup>2</sup> Women’s advertisements heavily marketed their products with American pride during the war. For example in Figure 1, a *Ladies Home Journal* advertisement for Cutex nail polish from 1944 strongly emphasized beauty as a sign of patriotism.<sup>3</sup> After World War II, new cosmetics hit the market so women could achieve the new feminine trend that emphasized sexuality. While the red lipstick trend remained strong in the fifties, the marketing angle changed. Instead of being a

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<sup>1</sup> Kathy Lee Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998), Kindle edition.

<sup>2</sup> Madeleine Marsh, *Compacts and Cosmetics: Beauty from Victorian times to the Present Day* (Barnsley, South Yorkshire: Remember When, 2009), Kindle edition.

<sup>3</sup> Unknown, "Cutex Advertisement," advertisement from *Ladies Home Journal*, August 1944.

patriotic symbol, now the advertising industry marketed red lipstick with sex. In Figure 2, an advertisement for Pond's new lipstick shade "Beau Bait" used the tagline "These'll hook him every time!" to imply the sultry shade would enable the wearer to bait a potential spouse.<sup>4</sup> With a shortage of men after the war, women wore the feminine and sexual makeup as a way to attract husbands. In the 1950s makeup was a symbol of sex and femininity, and it was societally expected to be worn at all times. Even advertisements for Avon urged women to "take time out for beauty" as seen in Figure 3.<sup>5</sup> However, in the 1960s, that one set beauty standard broke down completely as women from various age groups, ethnicities and political affiliations challenged what it meant to be feminine.

The sixties was the decade of the teenager with trends geared heavily towards the young demographic. For the first time, nearly half of the population consisted of youth. Fashion icons such as Twiggy stepped onto the scene and created a beauty trend for the young women of the decade. The cosmetic industry and advertisers heavily catered to the new youthful look ushered in by the 1960s. Teenagers did not want to look like their mothers, so they said goodbye to the perfectly dolled face and vibrant lips. While their mothers opted for a face that looked perfectly flawless with matte foundation, their daughters wanted a face that looked barely touched by makeup with a dewy complexion. It was all about looking youthful with the "bare look" and pale lips. Because female teenagers accounted for eleven percent of the U.S. population, they greatly influenced the cosmetic industry by purchasing roughly twenty-five percent of the beauty products sold.<sup>6</sup> For cosmetic companies it was important to cater to this demographic because -

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<sup>4</sup> Unknown, "Pond Advertisement"(1945), location unknown, advertisement.

<sup>5</sup> Unknown, "Avon Cosmetics Advertisement" (1956), location unknown, advertisement.

<sup>6</sup> Victoria Sherrow, *For Appearance' Sake: The Historical Encyclopedia of Good Looks, Beauty, and Grooming*. (Phoenix, AZ: Oryx Press, 2001), 89.

thanks to the postwar economy - teenagers could now afford makeup products. This caused an emergence of teen magazines and advertisements geared directly for teens, more specifically, white middle-class teens.<sup>7</sup>

Teenagers were tired of the stifling fifties conformity and expressed their freedom through innovative looks as a direct break away from the 1950s idealized woman. Eye makeup became quite artistic and dramatic among young women in the 1960s, another way they distinguished themselves from their mothers. The dramatic eye makeup consisted of thick, black eyeliner and in some cases, drawn on bottom eyelashes - Twiggy's signature look. The British model graced the cover of *Seventeen Magazine* in 1967, seen in Figure 4, sporting the popular Mod makeup.<sup>8</sup> Her magazine covers in the late sixties helped to bring Great Britain's Mod trend to the United States during the British Invasion. Though Mod itself was a complex subculture of its own in England, the American youth molded it into their own unique subculture where they were able to uniquely express themselves.

As the 1960s progressed, a new style was created altogether because of the counterculture music. The youth felt incredible pressure on the home front. The Vietnam War was at its height, and they were disillusioned with the government. Some young women ran away from home to San Francisco during "the Summer of Love" in 1967 or other hippie festivals because they wanted to be in a free loving and peaceful environment. The makeup trend in the hippie counterculture heavily focused on the natural look with very minimal makeup. Advertisers caught wind of the changing trends among the disillusioned young adults and began marketing products towards this growing demographic. In a print ad for Yardley (Figure 5), a British

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<sup>7</sup> Julia Willet, *The American Beauty Industry Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood, 2010): 275.

<sup>8</sup> *Seventeen Magazine*, September 1967, cover.

cosmetics company, pale green eye shadow was marketed with “glow back to nature” and featured a young model with long, blonde hair and a crown of flowers on her head.<sup>9</sup>

However, the counterculture movement did not always emphasize the natural look. Another popular makeup trend found among young women in these hippie gatherings was colorful face paint. Very bright rainbow colors were applied not just on the face, but on the body as well. Young women drew colorful flowers and peace signs on their faces and bodies, giving rise to the “flower girl” or “flower child” terms.<sup>10</sup> Their use of makeup in this way expressed their personal feelings of the world. It was fun, artistic, and beautiful. This group, so disillusioned with the world around them, used cosmetics to portray ideas of love and peace that they desperately wanted. It did not take long for women’s magazines and cosmetic advertisements to market colorful face and body paint to young women. On the July 1967 cover of *Vogue* (Figure 6), Twiggy appeared with a purple and pink flower painted across the right side of her face which is a look that directly marketed to the women partaking in the counterculture movement.<sup>11</sup>

Of course teens were not the only group to express themselves through makeup. Women of all ages and ethnicities were embracing new makeup trends in this liberal decade. In previous decades, African-American women adhered to beauty standards set by white women. During the 1940s-50s most advertisements for African-American women featured skin lightening and other aids “designed to take the natural darkness out of the black complexion.”<sup>12</sup> The standard set before the 1960s, and even continuing into the early 1960s, was an emphasis on light skin and

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<sup>9</sup> Unknown, “Yardley Advertisement,” advertisement from *Cosmopolitan*, May 1971.

<sup>10</sup> Victoria Pitts-Taylor, *Cultural Encyclopedia of the Body*. Vol. 1. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2008), 146-148.

<sup>11</sup> *Vogue Magazine*, July 1967, cover.

<sup>12</sup> Michael Leslie, “Slow fade to?: Advertising in Ebony magazine, 1957-1989.” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 72, no. 2 (Summer 95 1995), 426.

downplaying traditional African features. The Civil Rights Movement along with subsequent empowerment movements allowed African-American women to reject the white female idealism and embrace their natural beauty. In a speech delivered in 1962, prominent African-American activist Malcolm X asked, “Who taught you to hate the color of your skin, to such extent that you bleach to get like the white man?...you should ask yourself who taught you to hate being what God made you.”<sup>13</sup> The Civil Rights Movement helped establish new trends for African-American women. The Black Power movements embraced the natural beauty of African-American women. They became proud of the natural beauty in the mid-sixties and proudly sported afros and their natural complexions as a symbol of their freedom from the white dominated beauty standards. In 1968 while the highly televised and controversial Miss America Pageant commenced, African American women put on their own beauty pageant as a protest to the lack of diversity within Miss America.<sup>14</sup>

As the Civil Rights Movement gained traction, discrimination in commercial beauty culture became a more prevalent issue. African-American women were denied service in white-owned salons and there were race-specific requirements for hairdressers and cosmetologists within the beauty industry.<sup>15</sup> By the mid-sixties, the industry became more inclusive and opportunities for African-American women increased, albeit, at a slow pace. In the June 1966 issue of *Ebony* seen in Figure 7, Diana Smith graced the cover.<sup>16</sup> Unlike previous cover models, Smith was a twenty-year old civil rights worker – not a professional model. The

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<sup>13</sup> Malcolm X. "Who Taught You to Hate Yourself Speech." YouTube. 2007. Accessed April 19, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gRSgUTWffMQ>.

<sup>14</sup> Elizabeth Matelski, "(Big and) Black is Beautiful: Body Image and Expanded Beauty Ideals in the African American Community, 1945-1968." *Essays In History* (January 2012), 3-20.

<sup>15</sup> Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, Kindle edition.

<sup>16</sup> *Ebony Magazine*, July 1966, cover.

cover story was titled “The Natural Look: New Mode for Black Women” and her appearance on the cover was an important symbol for the African-American community. Smith was the first to have an Afro on the cover of a middle-class African-American publication, but she also symbolized the political activism and the natural look trumping white America’s beauty standards.<sup>17</sup> African-American women were more liberated now that the structure of feminine beauty was dismantled. In the 1960s, the “black is beautiful” expression arose and was embraced by generations of African-Americans who sought to become more Afro-centric in their appearance and behavior.<sup>18</sup>

With the political atmosphere changing, the cosmetic industry realized that it needed to become more inclusive. They could no longer rely on just white women purchasing their products as there were outcries for cosmetic lines to carry products for darker complexions. By the late 1960s, African-Americans comprised eleven percent of the U.S. population and “spent more than \$30 billion per year for consumer goods and services.”<sup>19</sup> With eleven percent spending billions of dollars per year on consumer goods, which included beauty products, companies slowly began developing new products and advertisements for African-American women. In a 1966 print ad for Posner Brush-On seen in Figure 8, a woman of color was the focus. On one half of her face her skin is lightened, depicting the previous trend of skin lightening. On the other half, she is applying foundation that complements her rich skin tone. Posner characterized this foundation as “especially for your brunette-toned complexion.”<sup>20</sup> The popular door-to-door company Avon incorporated African-American women by developing a wider range of

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<sup>17</sup> Matelski, “(Big and) Black is Beautiful,” 4.

<sup>18</sup> Leslie, “Slow fade to?,” 427.

<sup>19</sup> Leslie, “Slow fade to?,” 427.

<sup>20</sup> Unknown, “Posner Advertisement”(1966), advertisement from *Ebony*, July 1966.

foundation shades to match their deeper complexions. Going a step further, Avon hired women of color and produced catalogues in Spanish to improve their company's expansion to minority women.<sup>21</sup>

Although teenagers and minority women accepted new beauty trends with open arms, the feminists of the Women's Rights Movement rejected cosmetics altogether. Feminists pointed out the various flaws with makeup because they took issue with the marketing of makeup as well as the idea of wearing makeup in general. Popular feminist leader Betty Friedan wrote in her 1963 work, *The Feminine Mystique*, that "when one begins to think about it, America depends rather heavily on women's passive dependence, their femininity. Femininity, if one still wants to call it that, makes American women a target and a victim of the sexual sell."<sup>22</sup> Friedan harshly criticized the advertising industry because of its portrayal of and marketing for women. She argued that femininity kept women passive and vulnerable to being sold products based on sexuality.

In the late sixties, feminists indicated the beauty industry as a major cause for women's oppression.<sup>23</sup> The more radical feminists felt the societal pressure on women to live up to the standard of beauty was an example of patriarchal oppression as women were treated like objects to be "displayed and exploited."<sup>24</sup> As historian Kathy Peiss wrote:

Unattainable standards of beauty had an effect at once intense and narcotic: Women were driven into an absorption with appearances, into making themselves the objects of men's visual pleasure. Thus beauty practices simultaneously diverted and excluded women from intellectual work, meaningful social participation, and politics.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, Kindle edition.

<sup>22</sup> Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1963), Kindle edition.

<sup>23</sup> Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, Kindle edition.

<sup>24</sup> Steve Craig, "Feminism, Femininity, and the "Beauty" Dilemma: How Advertising Co-opted the Women's Movement." *The Feminist eZine*. January 1998.

<sup>25</sup> Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, Kindle edition.

Women only comprised six percent of doctors, three percent of lawyers, and less than one percent of engineers in the sixties.<sup>26</sup> As Friedan and Peiss noted, beauty impacted women's involvement in professional fields as women felt limited. In one of their most famous endeavors, feminists protested the 1968 Miss America Beauty Pageant in Atlantic City. They felt Miss America represented the ideal beauty standard that the sixties had been deconstructing. They set up "freedom cans," that they threw their beauty products, bras, and other oppressive items in as a symbol to end women's objectification. In a flyer advertising the protest of the beauty pageant, the Women's Liberation group told women to bring "old bras, girdles, high heeled shoes, women's magazines, curlers, and other instruments of torture for women" to be placed in the symbolic freedom cans.<sup>27</sup> Robin Morgan of Women's Liberation explained why her organization needed to protest the Pageant; it projected an image that put emphasis on "body over brains, on youth rather than maturity, and on commercialism rather than humanity."<sup>28</sup>

In another flyer for the event, the tagline read "Slavery Exists!" and listed the various ideas that enslaved Miss America such as selling the image of sex, conformity and capitalism.<sup>29</sup> Miss America represented the perfect, unattainable woman selling her image of femininity, a pawn used to sell products to women. Advertisers were called sexist by feminists, and they protested the sexism seen in the advertisements and media by putting stickers reading "Sexist" on print ads and newspaper articles.<sup>30</sup> Cosmetic companies responded to these protests by

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<sup>26</sup> "The 1960s-70s American Feminist Movement: Breaking Down Barriers for Women." Tavaana. Accessed April 22, 2016. <https://tavaana.org/en/content/1960s-70s-american-feminist-movement-breaking-down-barriers-women>.

<sup>27</sup> Women's Liberation. "No More Miss America." Advertisement. September 1968.

<sup>28</sup> "Request for Demonstration Permit." Robin Morgan to Richard Jackson. August 29, 1968. Atlantic City, New Jersey.

<sup>29</sup> Women's Liberation. "Slavery Exists." Advertisement. September 1968.

<sup>30</sup> "The 1960s-70s American Feminist Movement," Accessed April 22, 2016, <https://tavaana.org/en/content/1960s-70s-american-feminist-movement-breaking-down-barriers-women>.

redesigning their product packaging and revised their advertising to address the new understanding of feminine beauty. For example, Estee Lauder introduced a new line of products that directly catered to feminists and professionals. In 1967 Estee Lauder introduced Clinique, a line of products focused on hygiene over beauty and asexuality with its neutral color palette and nondescript advertising.<sup>31</sup>

Although radical feminists saw femininity and cosmetics as hindrances in the advancement of women, the beauty industry actually helped the Women's Movement. Attractive feminist leaders utilized makeup and contributed the Women's Movement's exposure in the media. Because of political figures like Gloria Steinem and Germaine Greer, media was attracted to their appealing image and - more importantly - their words. These women became the faces of feminism to the public and provided examples of feminists who were not the "negative stereotypes of humorless, ugly, man-hating shrews."<sup>32</sup> Steinem and Greer demonstrated how makeup could be used not as a symbol of male oppression but as a tool to increase women's exposure.

After a decade full of social reform and equality protests, the housewives who were not impressed with Friedan's depiction of them in *The Feminine Mystique* embraced their femininity. Entrepreneur Mary Kay Ash who founded the cosmetic company Mary Kay was a conservative woman who believed in the traditional ideals of womanhood and sought out displaced homemakers and women rocked by the social and economic turmoil to work for her company. She created job opportunities for women, catered to women's needs as mothers and avowed women's desires to look feminine.<sup>33</sup> In some regards, Ash was a feminist as she agreed

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<sup>31</sup> Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, Kindle edition.

<sup>32</sup> "The 1960s-70s American Feminist Movement."

<sup>33</sup> Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, Kindle edition.

that women needed economic empowerment and demanded recognition of women's professional abilities. However, Ash differed with feminists because she strongly believed women wanting to earn respect in the business world needed to demonstrate respect to male authority by wearing feminine clothing, makeup, and hairstyles.<sup>34</sup> While Ash advocated for women's ventures into professional fields outside of the home, she still supported traditional female roles. She was able to create a balance between feminist ideals and the traditional feminine beauty, helping women feel empowered while maintaining their preferred beauty trends.

The conformity of beauty in the fifties simplified femininity, something women of the sixties dismantled with ease. The bold youth were the first to reject society's standards of beauty and created their own. African-American women championed the phrase "black is beautiful" and proudly expressed their beauty that rejected white America's standards. Feminists then asked what female beauty meant. They questioned society's dictation that all women must wear makeup and sought to advance women's position while Mary Kay Ash worked to empower women and allow them to maintain their femininity. As Yoko Ono once said, "the 1960s were about releasing ourselves from conventional society and freeing ourselves."<sup>35</sup> By rejecting the previous conformed beauty standards, women released themselves from conventional society and freed themselves.

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<sup>34</sup> Beth Kreydatus, "'Enriching Women's Lives': The Mary Kay Approach to Beauty, Business, and Feminism," *Business and Economic History On-Line* 3 (2005).

<sup>35</sup> AskMen Editors July 20, 2007. "Interview: Yoko Ono." AskMen. June 20, 2007. Accessed April 22, 2016. [http://www.askmen.com/celebs/interview/57\\_yoko\\_ono\\_interview.html](http://www.askmen.com/celebs/interview/57_yoko_ono_interview.html).

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