# Beauty and Business

## Commerce, Gender, and Culture in Modern America

**Philip Scranton**


Hagley Perspectives on Business and Culture

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## COMMERCE, GENDER, AND CULTURE IN MODERN AMERICA

EDITED BY PHILIP SCRANTON

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# Preface

PHILIP SCRANTON

In March 1999, more than a hundred scholars, students, museum staffers, and intrigued individuals gathered at the Hagley Museum and Library to participate in a unique conference focused on the intersections of beauty and business in the United States. The energy and enthusiasm generated by researchers' presentations set in motion the process that yielded this collection, which initiates a Routledge series, Hagley Perspectives on Business and Culture. These prefatory paragraphs will offer a few background remarks and brief sketches of the essays that follow.

In an effort to promote productive connections between gender history and business history, Hagley's Center for the History of Business, Technology and Society organized a symposium on the theme "Gender and Business" in November 1996. Wendy Gamber (Indiana University) and Kathy Peiss (University of Massachusetts-Amherst) delivered papers linking their research on dressmakers/milliners and the cosmetics trade, respectively, to prospects for future inquiry. Joan Scott (Institute for Advanced Study) provided a wide-ranging, provocative response. Suitably revised, their essays reached a broader audience when included in the Summer 1998 issue of *Business History Review*.[1] In the interim, the center's Associate Director, Roger Horowitz, and I considered possible venues for extending this initiative. Appreciating that Kathy Peiss's book-length study of cosmetics in America was nearing publication,[2] we invited her to join in developing a conference on beauty and business since the late nineteenth century. Our call for papers drew a mass of proposals, in itself a signal that this was a timely theme. Having devised the program, headed by Professor Peiss's keynote, we were delighted

when Routledge editor Deirdre Mullane contacted us, expressing interest in publishing a collection of the papers, perhaps supplemented by engaging collateral work. The near-term result of these interactions is this volume; the longer term outcome will be a Routledge series, Hagley Perspectives on Business and Culture, anchored by research presented at other Hagley conferences. At this juncture, two additional collections are "in the works," and we presently are planning three more for the years ahead. Now, a quick summary of what you will find in the pages that follow.

Kathy Peiss's "On Beauty. . . and the History of Business" sets out a thematic agenda for current and future research, emphasizing that a sizable segment of the American economy has become centered on selling beauty and fashion, that beauty is integral to multiple business strategies, and that culturally, beauty has been attached to a wide range of "goods," from art to bodies. Part I, "Images and Reforms," presents four papers that capture complementary elements of the interplay between gender, business, shifting values, and social practices from the 1870s through the 1920s. Drawing on designs and museum-conserved garments, Sarah Gordon analyzes the controversies triggered by women's rising participation in sports and active leisure, whereas Nancy Bowman illuminates the gendered constructions of smoking and the cultural tensions sparked when fashionable and young women adopted cigarettes. Next, Carole Turbin's examination of the "collar wars"' class and gender implications after 1900 shows how contested notions of masculinity became entwined with innovations in shirt designs. Looking directly at businessmen, in part through too-rarely consulted trade journals, Jill Fields revisits corset makers' panic attacks when they believed women's widespread rejection of their products was surfacing after 1910, as fashionable clothing and body images shifted away from Victorian ideals.

In Part II, "Business and Work," we encounter women as entrepreneurs and employees in the beauty trades from the 1920s through the post–World War II era. Katina Manko goes "inside the firm" at California Perfume (later Avon) to explicate a business strategy that yielded steady profitability during the century's most economically troubled decade. Reconstructing the social relations and political dimensions of African-American beauty shop culture, Tiffany Gill establishes the critical role these businesswomen (and their organizations) played in creating free spaces, sustaining communities, and battling discrimination. Having mined company newsletters and union correspondence, Vicki Howard documents how a shared beauty culture shaped the work experiences of women operatives at Maidenform just as the company undertook to commercialize its postwar image of the ultrafeminine body. Closing Part II, Nancy Koehn's

business biography of Estée Lauder employs a classic historical form to illustrate the interplay between ambition and contingency that underlay one female entrepreneur's rise to international prominence.

"Constructing Commodities," the collection's final section, treats the commercial nexus between business and beauty during and after the 1950s, focusing most directly on the female body. Susannah Walker explains that although in the sixties African-American women's adoption of the "natural" hairstyle represented both a radical departure from customary practice and a political statement, in time the Afro also became a business opportunity for salon operators and beauty product manufacturers. At the same time, gender, ethnicity, and the Cold War intersected in complex and surprising ways, as Judy Tzu-Chun Wu demonstrates in her close examination of the Miss Chinatown U.S.A. beauty pageants, sponsored by San Francisco's Chinese American business association. Beginning in the 1950s, as Kirsten Gardner notes, information about breast cancer and mastectomies began circulating widely, helping create a niche market for prosthesis makers whose devices embodied the notion that concealing surgery's effects meant a survivor's return to "normal." Gardner here explores the marketing of breast replacements as well as these commodities' contested psychological and cultural messages.

In these twelve essays, as so often with a relatively new area of cross-disciplinary research, historical inquiries proceed in multiple directions, using a variety of approaches and sounding common themes but in a range of keys. Bringing these voices together in this volume has not involved pressing them toward harmonizing, for the dissonances and the diversities well express the rich possibilities of exploring the beauty-business relation. It is our hope that encountering the work that follows will prove as thought-provoking for you as experiencing the conference and producing this collection has been for us.

## NOTES

1. *Business History Review* 72:2 (Summer 1998), Special Section: Gender and Business, 185–249.
2. Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar,* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998).

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# Acknowledgments

The editor owes multiple debts of gratitude to those institutions and individuals who have made this collection possible. Glenn Porter, Hagley's director, has provided crucial institutional and personal support for the center's efforts to encourage creative scholarship concerning business and technology in American society. Roger Horowitz, my colleague at Hagley and the series' coeditor, is the sharpest yet most relaxed intellectual partner I could wish for. Together, Carol Lockman, the center's indefatigable coordinator, and Roger built a conference from scraps of paper and piles of proposals, then managed the endless details necessary to making it happen. As ever, Hagley's experienced staff helped the sessions flow flawlessly.

Kathy Peiss has been an invaluable colleague before, during, and after the "Beauty and Business" sessions, joining the program committee, delivering the lead paper, commenting on a session, and helping select the essays for this collection. There is more. In 1997, the Business History Conference had commenced the process of creating a new journal, *Enterprise and Society,* a quarterly that debuted in March 2000. Its editor, Will Hausman, invited Roger, Kathy, and me to select several of the "Beauty and Business" papers to form a special issue during its inaugural year. Kathy took principal responsibility for working with these four authors and their essays, assisted by Sally Clarke (University of Texas–Austin) and Will (College of William and Mary). My thanks to them for hard work well done and to *Enterprise and Society* for permission to reprint articles from that issue (Vol. 1, No. 3, September 2000) by Kathy Peiss, Carole Turbin, Vicki Howard, Susannah Walker, and Kirsten Gardner.

Roger Horowitz recollected reading Judy Wu's Miss Chinatown U.S.A. article in the Fall 1997 *Journal of Social History*. Happily, Professor Wu accepted my invitation to include it, and the journal's editors kindly permitted its being reprinted here, along with Jill Field's conference paper, which first appeared in the *JSH's* Winter 1999 issue. At Routledge, Deirdre Mullane's enthusiasm for this project and for the series has been gratifying and invigorating. Derek Krissoff's assistance with the complexities of permissions was timely and priceless. Most important, it is essential to acknowledge the twelve authors of *Beauty and Business,* all of whom gracefully endured my nattering about schedules and deadlines, and my many critical and trivial comments on drafts as well. I thank each author for presenting her work in the first volume of the Hagley Perspectives, and, as many of these essays preview books-in-progress, I look forward to the shelf of monographs these studies will generate.

# On Beauty . . . and the History of Business

KATHY PEISS

What can business historians learn by making beauty a subject of research and investigation? Beauty and business—one might as well say: beauty and the beast. These terms conjure up distinct domains, different images, and contrasting values. Beauty is seemingly frivolous, superficial, and female, the subject of aesthetics, art, poetry, and most recently, feminist criticism. Business, in contrast, connotes serious, consequential, indeed manly activity, the intellectual domain of economists and social scientists.

Until recently, business historians have not yielded to beauty—at least as a subject of scholarly inquiry. The field has been so much defined by studies of heavy industry and corporate power that the activities of hairdressers, fashion designers, and Avon ladies have largely gone unnoticed. But beauty is big business, with large-scale production, international distribution networks, media-saturation advertising, scientific marketing, and sales in the billions of dollars. And business historians have begun to take notice. Placing business within the broad narratives of American history, they increasingly investigate how economic enterprises interacted with cultural and social developments, responding to and influencing them in turn. They have opened new directions for research on gender, race, the creation of markets, and the role of consumers. Interest in beauty, style, and fashion is a logical development in the new business history.[1]

And what of those who write about beauty? They pay much more attention to the power of representation—paintings, poems, prescriptive literature, and advertising images—than to the strategies of business. Critics of the commercialization of beauty tend to treat business as a monolith, an industry whose motives are uniform, actions syn-

chronized, and effects transparent.[2] The papers in this collection go beyond such approaches to investigate closely the relationship between beauty and business practices. They explore the assumptions and decision-making of entrepreneurs, manufacturers, retailers, advertisers, and consumers. They consider how changing ideals of beauty, notions of fashion, and attitudes to the body shaped business strategies. Just as important, they show how businesses profited from their attention to beauty and influenced cultural ideals and social identities embodied in faces, figures, and fashion. These case studies demonstrate that beauty and business are worth pondering further.

A broad look at the historical relationship between beauty and business points to several key approaches to this subject. One concerns the emergence of a large sector of the economy devoted to selling beauty aids, fashions, bodily care, and style to American women and, increasingly, to men. Another is the deployment of beauty as a business strategy in creating brands, sales, and marketing, in managing the workplace, and in projecting corporate identities. A third considers the sale of beauty itself as a value added and attached to a wide range of goods, from art to bodies. These approaches offer new directions for future research.

### A SHORT DISQUISITION ON BEAUTY

The word *beauty* requires a closer look at the long-standing intellectual and cultural traditions that have defined its meaning. Beauty is an aesthetic category applied to art and objects, faces and bodies, nature and souls. In the Western tradition of aesthetics, at least since the eighteenth century, beauty has been understood as a quality apart, dissociated from history and social contingencies. For philosophers, poets, and artists, the aesthetic was an autonomous and transcendent realm outside the ordinary, the mundane, and the utilitarian. The contemplation of beauty—whether the sublimity of Niagara Falls, the sensuousness of a Rubens painting, or the charm of a young girl's face—took one out of the self into a higher realm of appreciation and discernment. Much ink was spilled in the nineteenth century in the effort to identify those qualities of female beauty upon which everyone could agree. There were "celestial" beauties—often tubercular or close to death—and robust pulchritude, classical Venuses and oriental exotics, blondes and brunettes, all placed in a moral order and physical hierarchy based on complexion, hair, and symmetry of face and form.[3]

This aesthetic tradition, with its assertion of universal standards and perceptions, has been challenged on many grounds by sociologists, feminist critics, postmodernists, and artists, among others. One especially useful critique insists upon the centrality of the historical and social contexts in which beauty takes form and achieves meaning. That,

in turn, requires a consideration of how meanings are ascribed to a wide range of cultural products, and by whom. How do particular societies or social groups define beauty? What categories of taste do they employ? How do they discern the qualities of the beautiful? When is an object "art" and when is it a "tchotchke"? What makes a beauty queen? This approach asks us to consider vernacular aesthetic forms as well as the Old Masters. And it requires us to study viewers' perceptions, their cultural frames of reference, and their social locations so as not to assume a universal subject.[4]

Beauty signifies difference in a number of registers, making distinctions between high and low, normal and abnormal, virtue and vice. In so doing, beauty helps to define morality, social status, class, gender, race, and ethnicity. Ideals of beauty, in turn, are fundamentally shaped by social relations and institutions, by other cultural categories and practices, and by politics and economics. Even so, beauty should not be reduced to any one of these: if not autonomous, the aesthetic is a realm with its own language and logic. One need not be a sociobiologist tracing contemporary attitudes toward beauty back to our evolutionary heritage and genetic hardwiring to think this.[5] Rather, one only need recognize that beauty ideals, as well as our perceptions and reactions, develop in complex ways.

Each historical period has its own culturally specific standards of beauty: the hourglass figure of the 1890s, the boyish flapper of the 1920s, the unisex look of the 1960s. Yet conceptions of beauty are quite long-lived, their referents going far back in time: in the West, the classical beauty of Greece and Rome remains a governing beauty ideal; many Americans still consider African appearances beautiful only if exoticized. At the same time, beauty is destabilizing because perception, which constructs beauty, occurs in complex individual and cultural circumstances. Beauty turns heads, stops the action, and evokes emotions from lust to piety. Once we have analyzed the social constructions, cultural practices, politics, and economics, we still may not fully understand what beauty does in people's lives and what it means. In its largest sense, aesthetics offers us a way of knowing the world around us in a different key from, say, science or religion. Beauty is, in Suzanne Langer's evocative phrase, "significant form." And it is a form that in the past century has been increasingly mobilized and informed by business enterprise.[6]

### THE BEAUTY SECTOR OF THE ECONOMY

Beauty and business seem most closely related in the modern era, but beauty has always been for sale. Whenever and wherever markets arise, beauty has had a commercial value. Art markets developed among elites, whether Renaissance princes, Gilded Age robber barons, or Cold

War corporate leaders. As patrons to artists and buyers of beautiful objects, they claimed and projected cultural power. Romanticist ideals of beauty in nature, from the pastoral to the sublime, became the currency of real estate and tourism: a splendid view turned a profit.[7]

Beauty added exchange value to women, whether in the market in slaves, in prostitutes, or in wives. Abolitionist writer and former bondswoman Harriet Jacobs noted how beauty was a misfortune for African women sold as commodities in slavery, since it made them the sexual prey of their masters. Women who bargained their sexual services as prostitutes worked in a hierarchy. Beauty, youth, and fashionability were for sale in "high-class" brothels; women without those attributes toiled in factorylike "cribs" and walked the streets. And as feminists from Mary Wollstonecraft to Emma Goldman charged, *marriage* was a market in which beauty, not brains, found the highest bidder. It is no coincidence that cosmetics and paints were viewed in the nineteenth century as particularly pernicious symbols of commerce, linked to prostitution, female con artists, and tainted goods.[8]

If beauty ideals and practices were shaped by earlier exchange values, they in turn set limits and created opportunities for the modern fashion and beauty industries. Despite similar emphases on style and appearance, beauty and fashion actually followed different logics, and the businesses that sold them developed on separate tracks. In distinct ways, entrepreneurs, local firms, national businesses, and mass media projected beauty and fashion as representations, sold them as tangible goods, and promoted them in the name of service to women.

The "fashion system" predated the emergence of a widespread commercial beauty culture. Fashion transforms clothes as material objects through a process of style creation and information dissemination; it requires news about "what's new" to be spread in print, through images, and by word of mouth. The nineteenth-century publishing industry, especially the genteel women's magazine, created and interpellated women readers in part by promoting new styles and taste. Making fashion the centerpiece of its appeal, *Godey's Lady's Book* contained the latest news from Paris, London, and New York, ran engravings and fashion plates, and offered instructions for updating older clothes with trimmings, embroidery, new sleeves, and other techniques.[9]

In the nineteenth century, genuine beauty was considered different from fashion—a timeless, inner, and natural quality, not mutable, external, or socially driven. Still, magazine and book publishers made advice, illustrations, and fiction about beauty a salable product that helped fuel the publishing boom after 1830: Don't buy cosmetics, went the sales pitch, but do buy the book on how to achieve moral beauty. *Godey's* and handsome gift books disseminated ideals of appearance to

affluent women, while low-cost beauty manuals reached factory hands and domestic workers. Expanded literacy, faster and cheaper printing technologies, and new book distribution systems fostered a market for beauty advice across the socioeconomic spectrum.[10]

What scholars call "prescriptive literature"—in contrast to such private writings as letters and diaries—was often, in fact, a product of business and should be examined in that light. In *Godey's* and the advice manuals, emergent genre conventions, representational strategies, and narrative structures developed to keep women buying and reading. The fashion plates and gossip about Parisian and New York high society promised the *dernier cri* to American women in the hinterlands. Magazine fiction gratified readers' interest in good looks while implicitly praising their good sense and good names: short stories featured willful beauties who painted and primped in pursuit of husbands and fortune but died of lead poisoning from toxic face powder or developed consumption after dancing all night in sheer, low-cut ball gowns.[11]

If nineteenth-century beauty ideals tended to naturalize gender differences and legitimate the new cultural authority of the middle class, they also spurred the growth of a women's market in publishing. This early commercial dissemination of feminine ideals and images was critical in the making of mass-market beauty and fashion industries. It began a long-term process of educating the eye, channeling desires, and creating an identification between representation and viewer that would serve the sale of goods and foster new perceptions of beauty in the culture at large.

Just as important was the web of small-scale proprietors, entrepreneurs, manufacturers, and retailers who, by the late nineteenth century, had established fashion and beautifying as cultural practices linked to commerce. Their stories have been especially important to recover, for they complicate our historical understanding of the beauty and fashion sector of the economy and suggest some new directions for business history. Perhaps most significant is the role of women in these businesses: seamstresses, hairdressers, beauticians, department store buyers, and cosmetics saleswomen all made beauty and fashion integral to the lives of women. As Wendy Gamber shows, dressmakers and milliners were ambitious, independent, and skilled craftswomen who often became proprietors of their own shops, secured a competency, and achieved some standing in their communities. They had to be highly responsive to information about what was stylish, respectable, and attractive, and became authorities themselves, translating high style and fashion plates for local tastes and pocketbooks.[12]

The beauty business has also been and remains intensely personal. What began as domestic service—the hands-on care of the hair, face, and body by maids or slaves—became organized into businesses

by individual proprietors and entrepreneurs in the late nineteenth century. These beauty enterprises began to appear in cities across the country: a manicure shop tucked away in a multifloor walk-up, a storefront hair salon, a "beauty college" in a loft, cosmetics counters front and center in department stores.[13]

These businesses opened opportunities for some women by aligning commercial enterprise with the very ideals of femininity and beauty that had long justified women's exclusion from most lines of work. In a culture that celebrated inner, moral beauty, they placed a new emphasis on external appearance and its cultivation through the purchase and use of cosmetics and other beauty aids. They directed their business and marketing efforts not only to the affluent but to working women, African Americans, and immigrants, drawing upon the cultural practices and institutions familiar to women in their everyday life.

The beauty business joined the sale of goods to the provision of services in innovative ways. Avon saleswomen went into homes to teach women about beauty products and how to use them. Unlike selling vacuum cleaners and encyclopedias door to door, selling beauty often involved a long-term, continuous relationship between seller and buyer. Salons were based in specific localities and their hands-on approach offered the pleasure of touch, the promise of makeover, and the enjoyment of sociability. Franchising operations and beauty schools spread across the country what began as local, personal endeavors; women went to a Madam C. J. Walker or Marinello shop for a particular experience of hairstyling, grooming, and social interaction. In African-American salons, the small talk between hairdresser and client sometimes turned to matters of economic and political import and even nourished community activism and the Civil Rights movement.[14]

Woven into the "house calls" of the Avon Lady and the wash-and-set at the beauty parlor was an ongoing conversation about appearances that opened out in many directions. These businesses encouraged a high degree of self-consciousness of the face and body. Operating in a local context, they reinforced yet mediated the barrage of advertising, motion pictures, and national magazines that fostered an external, visual standard for self-assessment.

Selling beauty itself as a product became much more systematic, self-conscious, and widespread after 1920. Historians have only begun to research the full dimensions of this effort across the economy and society—not only in specific cosmetics, hair care, clothing, and accessories firms, but in modeling agencies, commercial beauty contests, cosmetic surgery, weight camps, the health club business, and other enterprises. Scholars have delineated the role of beauty and fashion in furthering the development of national and mass markets. They have written extensively, for instance, on the "tie-in" as an integrative busi-

ness strategy in cosmetics and fashion marketing by which local retailers, national advertisers, mass-circulation magazines, and movies aligned their interests. Film producers built moments of female display and spectacle into the movies not only for the male gaze but also for women viewers—the obligatory "how do I look" scene in front of the mirror or the staging of a fashion show. Movie studios struck agreements with clothing manufacturers to highlight new styles. If a dress received particular notice from fans—like one worn by Bette Davis in *Letty Lynton*—it was quickly manufactured at popular prices and featured in department stores.[15]

These cooperative strategies and nationalizing tendencies stand in contrast to the ongoing conflicts among local businesses, national media, and mass manufacturers. The local and regional remain salient in the modern beauty and fashion business. Although the rise of ready-to-wear fashions put many dressmakers out of business or turned their activity into alteration work for stores, women with an understanding of clothes often became specialty shop owners or department store buyers. Buyers made and continue to make decisions about New York or Paris fashions based on their understanding of hometown constituencies. Specialty shops have sought the trust of customers through personal service and sensitivity to local standards of beauty and style.[16] That sensitivity is not just a matter of price but an awareness of taste—what color palette, design elements, and accessories appeal to the eyes of women in their communities, whether middle-class African Americans, Jewish retirees in Florida, or working-class secretaries in Dallas. Beauty shops also mediate the national and the local. Salon operatives promote trends created by product manufacturers, trade associations, and celebrity hair designers while remaining attentive to the particular practices and views of their patrons.

If beauty is a signifier of difference, beauty businesses—whether national, regional, or local—have continually made choices about what differences to emphasize, reinforce, or efface. Hairdressers have long been trained in different techniques that reinforce a racial distinction between "black" and "white" hair. Instructions on permanent waves in the 1930s, for instance, emphasized marcelling for white clients, croquignole waves for African-American women. Even after the desegregation of beauty schools and beauty shops in the 1960s, these customary distinctions continued. Hair is most obviously a potent symbol of gender difference. The rise of "unisex" salons and men's hairstyling in the 1960s was an important development in the beauty business that challenged the dominance of the barbershop as the bastion of male appearance. Unisex styling salons capitalized upon the larger questioning of traditional notions of masculinity by men in the "youth revolt," counterculture, and antiwar movements of the time.[17]

These examples suggest how much beauty businesses have shaped the social definitions and physical attributes of femininity and masculinity as well as race and ethnicity, age and generation, and class. They have done so not only through advertising but through product design, sales strategies, and in the daily operations and practices that underlie brand and company identity. For instance, in oral history interviews conducted by the Smithsonian, the Noxell (originally Noxzema) corporation and its advertisers were extremely forthcoming about their choices when developing and marketing Cover Girl makeup in the late 1950s and 1960s. Noxzema was already established as a maker of a medicated cleansing and moisturizing cream when it decided to create a makeup line. The product was in its initial development, intended for both young adult women and teenagers with "problem" skin, and the challenge was to make the product acceptable to both groups as well to parents of teens anxious about their daughters' use of makeup. Mary Ayres, an advertising executive handling the account, developed the idea of Cover Girl as a medicated makeup, with the advertising stressing both glamour and health. Among the early slogans were "glamour that's good for your skin" and "clean makeup."[18]

By the mid-sixties, the agency had consciously decided upon a particular vision of female beauty to sell this idea: a young, fair-skinned, sun-bleached blonde, fit and active yet absorbed in her own beauty. Modeled by Cybill Shepherd and Cheryl Tiegs, this "California look" was specifically intended to appeal to Middle America, the mass market and cultural mainstream. The ad designers perceived the light skin of models and white space in the ads as a "clean" look, and "cleanliness" was a message that they believed would appeal to girls and parents alike. The manufacturer had its own concerns, including keeping the price of the product competitive, simplifying packaging, gaining shelf space in drugstores, and managing consumers' choices in a self-service environment; for all these reasons the firm created at first only three, then seven shades of foundation, none of them appropriate for deep olive, brown, or black complexions. This example illustrates how a mass-market company, through a complex process of decision-making and a deeply engrained set of cultural biases, produces and reproduces racialized and gendered beauty ideals.

### AESTHETICIZATION AS A BUSINESS STRATEGY

The perception that "beauty sells" became commonplace in business after 1920. Scholars have studied how manufacturers and advertisers have long used representations of beautiful women and handsome men both to sell specific products and to promote consumption-oriented lifestyles. The "beauty appeal" as a self-conscious commercial strategy went further by promising consumers the psychological and social ben-

efits of better looks. The beauty appeal went well beyond the cosmetics and fashion industries, and was used to sell virtually any product that could be connected in some way to the body, self-presentation, and personal identity. Toothbrushes made by the Prophylactic brush company, once sold on the basis of health and hygiene, were now guaranteed to beautify one's smile; Wrigley's touted chewing gum as a five-minute facial for secretaries; automobile ads encouraged women to buy their cars to match their frocks. Articles on "beauty, the new business tool" appeared throughout trade journals, in-house newsletters, and the popular press.[19]

To many manufacturers, beauty was a measurable value added to goods, a quantum that could alter the perception and placement of products. Lever Brothers, maker of a popular laundry detergent, stressed the value of glamour when it introduced Lux toilet soap in 1925. It hired the J. Walter Thompson Company to develop a marketing and advertising campaign. When Thompson offered its proposal for ads that promoted Lux as a "new form" of soap, Lever's president complained that the ads would confuse consumers into thinking that the soap was simply another kind of laundry detergent. "Our idea," he said, is that the toilet soap "should be placed on a pinnacle, removed from any suggestion of laundry or dishpan use." He urged the ad agency to replace the word "suds" with "lather" and depict the soap in the boudoir, not the kitchen. "We must throw more glamour around our new product to justify the price in the consumer's mind of 9c to 10c per cake. . . . Remember, we are lifting a laundry product up to a toilet plane."[20]

Aesthetic categories helped businesses define and build their markets. Cosmetics manufacturers relied heavily on package design and targeted advertising to reach particular consumers. African-American businessman Anthony Overton wanted the packaging of High Brown Face Powder to be elegant and respectable, and he chose the face of a woman with light brown skin and European features to adorn the label. The French perfumer Bourjois sold Java face powder in a traditional loose-powder container with a floral design, touting it as a "natural" beauty aid for conservative, older women who balked at looking made up; Bourjois placed the same powder in a jazzier package, named it Manon Lescault, and marketed it to flappers as a tool for man-hunting and romance. Businesses that used aesthetic codes to convey social and moral messages would find "it is quite possible to reach two mutually antagonistic classes of prospects," as one trade journal observed.[21]

Businesses worked with older aesthetic categories, updated and shaped them for commercial purposes, and made them relevant to the perceptions and tastes of consumers. Sales campaigns used typologies of beauty—dark and fair, foreign and exotic, ethereal and physical—to dif-

ferentiate products and markets. Max Factor and other cosmetics firms created complexion analysis charts to help women choose their "beauty type" and the best array of products. Earlier aesthetic dictates show up repeatedly in advertising. William Hogarth's "curve of beauty"—a sinuous S shape identified by the eighteenth-century writer as the most beautiful line—inspired an advertisement for Zip depilatory: The model's pose, one arm curved above her head to reveal a hairless underarm, rendered the otherwise indelicate subject artistic and tasteful.[22]

Business leaders also adopted new artistic movements they perceived as having commercial value. The forward-looking aesthetic of Art Moderne was attached to many products with varying degrees of success. Everything from trains to toasters was streamlined to convey a sense of speed and modernity. The beauty firm Marinello even packed face cream in jars that looked like set-back skyscrapers. Retailers looked to artists and museums for aesthetic inspiration and design trends for store layouts, show windows, and special events. Advertisers, too, used new artistic elements to position their products in the marketplace, hiring such leading photographers as Edward Steichen to take modernist shots of hands for Jergens Skin Lotion. Coordinated designs and ensembles, inspired by clothing fashion, could be seen in products ranging from cosmetics to furniture to bathroom fixtures. Today this principle informs the lifestyle marketing of such stores as Pottery Barn and Rooms to Go.[23]

Beyond marketing and sales, beauty and appearance have played an important role in employment, conveying through the body a set of messages about a firm. Formal uniforms, customary dress codes, hairstyles, makeup requirements, and weight restrictions became visual cues that served to unify the corporate or brand identity, put forward a pleasing face to the public, and manage employees. This has been especially true in white-collar and service-sector jobs, in which people are, in a sense, part of the company's product. After World War II, when airlines chose women over men to work as flight attendants, rules stipulating appropriate appearance became commonplace. By the 1960s flight attendants were required to wear nail polish, lipstick, hats, gloves, and girdles; hair dye, bleach, Afros, and cornrows were banned. Limitations on body weight had nothing to do with overloading the plane and everything to do with projecting an image of svelte, youthful beauty. National Airlines' infamous "Fly Me" advertising campaign of the 1960s sold the vicarious experience of flight attendants' sexuality and beauty along with air transportation. Such requirements have increasingly become the source of individual and collective conflict in the workplace. In the 1970s, the flight attendants' union successfully fought both marital status and weight requirements as discriminatory; both requirements constructed "the stewardess" as youthful and attractive. African-American

women have challenged employers who bar cornrows, dreadlocks, and other hairstyles from the workplace: designating an appropriate corporate identity, they argue, has the effect of enforcing a "white" appearance. Even more widespread are the gender-, class-, and race-based assumptions about appropriate looks at different levels and kinds of business. These differences were evocatively captured in the 1988 film *Working Girl,* in which makeup, hair, and clothing styles distinguished the women managers from the secretaries. As Melanie Griffith's upwardly mobile and newly shorn character explains, "if you want to be taken seriously, you need to have serious hair."[24]

Aestheticization has also proven to be a powerful business strategy in establishing corporate identity. Since the 1930s, but especially after World War II, corporations have projected their economic and political power through a "corporate aesthetic." Henry Luce intentionally made *Fortune,* a general magazine for businessmen, into a beautiful physical object at the very moment—the onset of the Depression—when many publishers were cutting the quality of paper and illustrations and shrinking the size of magazines. Despite the high cost, Luce printed *Fortune* in large format and on heavy paper stock, hired modernist artists to design the covers, and commissioned renowned photographers to take the pictures that appeared inside the magazine.[25]

Individual and corporate ownership of art collections also became an important means of projecting cultural and economic authority. Helena Rubinstein had an extensive art collection, which she showed in her New York salon and loaned to museums; it underscored Rubinstein's belief that beautifying was not a practice of the vulgar and vain but a "decorative art," part of a celebrated aesthetic tradition. Some business leaders, such as Walter Paepcke, the head of the Container Corporation of America, patronized abstract artists as representatives of free enterprise and the free world. More generally, arts patronage, public sculpture, and commissions to renowned architects have been used in corporate, white-collar settings to project a sense of common mission and elevated status: the "corporate sublime."[26]

### BEAUTY FROM HIGH TO LOW

Business may promote the "corporate sublime" to express its higher aims but it has also used beauty for "lower" purposes. The exploitation and sale of sexualized beauty and its larger impact on the economy and society remain largely unexamined by business historians. Yet "smut-peddling"—as *Hustler* owner Larry Flynt quaintly calls it, evoking a bygone era of shrewd, sweet-talking men carrying packs full of trinkets—is in fact big business. Changing beauty ideals and images affected the contours and growth of this industry, including its movement from illicit trade to legitimate enterprise.

The modern invention of pornography has been linked to the development of printing and consequent distribution of books, magazines, pamphlets, and ephemeral literature, a development associated, interestingly, with the emergence of a Habermasian "civic" public sphere in the eighteenth century.[27] Beauty became more important to smut peddling as new image-making technologies developed. By the 1860s, the unique image of the daguerreotype gave way to *cartes-de-visite,* stereographs, and other reproducible formats. A lively trade resulted, not only in the manufacture of personal portraits, but also in the sale of the pictures. Photography studios, peddlers, and department stores marketed the faces and figures of actresses, dancers, burlesque performers, self-styled beauties—and naked women. Photographers embraced specific styles of posing, camera placement, and lighting that regularized images of beauty, including those intended to be sexually arousing. And they drew upon conventions of display and spectacle developed first in burlesque and musical reviews and later in body-building and beauty pageantry. Images of beauty used to sell products explicitly to men, especially those connoting a male "sporting" culture, emphasized female physical attributes. Bosomy, dark-featured women regularly appeared on cigar boxes, for instance.[28]

It is striking indeed how frequently businesses based on new image-making technologies have found in sex and sexualized beauty a means of gaining a foothold in the entertainment and information economy. In the early days of the motion pictures, most films were projected on screens in vaudeville shows, nickelodeons, and traveling exhibitions, but dime museums and "peep shows" featured kinescopes of women flirting and disrobing. Radio and television were tightly regulated for sexual content, but both the videocassette format and the new Internet commerce have depended heavily on sex as a source of profit. Blockbuster and other video outlets have, in fact, seriously undermined the older forms of sexual entertainment in vice districts, the peep shows and triple X theaters; what had once been largely a male viewing habit and male-defined product has changed dramatically with the striking numbers of women renting X-rated videos. In the early years of Internet commerce, high-tech smut peddlers have profited the most in this new medium of communication and entertainment.[29]

Until the last twenty-five years pornography was an illicit enterprise, and its history is still largely uncharted. These businesses were run by entrepreneurs who did not want their activities documented. What we do know comes largely from the traces of smut peddlers, lowlife printers, nude-model photographers, and others appearing in trial records and government-led crackdowns. The legal repression of obscenity, such as the Comstock Act, was fundamentally a restraint on trade, and pornographers fought to preserve their businesses, not just

their speech rights. Occasionally these firms did leave records, and one, at least, suggests the complex network of under- and aboveground transactions. H. Lynn Womack, a mail-order publisher of gay pornography, had contacts in photography studios, in the armed forces, and in the gay community who sent him snapshots and portraits of young men, either fully clothed or in briefs or bathing suits. From these he selected the images that best fit the appearance requirements of his publications—and he commented on them: the bodybuilder, a winsome "chicken," a "well-hung" model.[30] In this way, Womack actively constructed masculine beauty directed to the gay male market.

Since the 1950s, ideals of beauty have helped the pornography business redefine the line between licit and illicit, between "smut" and "adult entertainment." *Playboy* pioneered the way by calling itself a "men's magazine," with fiction, advice columns, and interviews, as well as naked women. The Playmate blurred the boundary between sex queen and girl-next-door. The magazine's photographers drew upon pictorial conventions from fashion photography and "pinup" posing. Airbrushing, makeup, and lighting perfected the beauty of the female image; layout further domesticated the sexualized image by juxtaposing the Playmate's naked body, personal biography, "everyday" snapshots, and portrait. The magazine's imagery was more similar to the style of the Miss America beauty pageant than to underground X-rated photographs. As courts chipped away the obscenity standard and many Americans embraced the "sexual revolution," the adult entertainment industry was born. This industry used familiar business strategies of legitimation: it started trade journals and associations, rationalized distribution and marketing, used genre narratives and visual conventions, and differentiated beauty ideals to appeal to different consumer tastes.[31]

Beauty, fashion, and style are threaded through the history of American business as products for sale, as systems of representations, and as categories of taste and discrimination. The implications of beauty in business are complex and contradictory: beauty images simultaneously promise and withhold, elevate and degrade. They are sanitized and sexualized, aspirational and arousing. Beauty has advanced modern business at many levels. It represents and projects corporate identities. It has opened entrepreneurial opportunities for women, even as it fosters the exploitation of women's bodies. Indeed, it has ignited the commercial potential of information and entertainment businesses.

Nor is this only an American story: the face of global capitalism is not so much streaked with sweat as carefully made up. The fall of the Soviet Union, for example, led to the resurgence of commercial beauty culture among Russian women, many of whom embraced a self-

consciously feminine beauty image that departed from the communist ideal. In China, India, and even Amazon rain forests, women sell Avon, Mary Kay, and other beauty products; as was the case a hundred years ago in the United States, these "microbusinesses" have given some women a foothold in the developing market economy.[32] Selling, marketing, and projecting beauty have become more important to the workings of a global, media-oriented economy. Commerce, in turn, links goods, looks, status, and identity to influence how cultures define the norms of appearance for women and men. Beauty and business may seem to exist in different domains but, as the new scholarship shows, their relationship grows ever closer and more significant.


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# *Part 1*

## IMAGES AND REFORMS

# "Any Desired Length"

## NEGOTIATING GENDER THROUGH SPORTS CLOTHING, 1870–1925

SARAH A. GORDON

At the age of 53, Frances Willard, leader of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, learned to ride a bicycle. When she rode her two-wheeler—which she named Gladys—she wore a tweed suit with the skirt three inches from the ground, and walking shoes. In her book, *How I Learned to Ride the Bicycle,* published in 1895, Willard critiqued women who claimed their conventional dress was comfortable, and wrote that: "reason will gain upon precedent, and ere long the comfortable, sensible, and artistic wardrobe of the rider will make the conventional style of woman's dress absurd to the eye and unendurable to the understanding."[1]

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, at a time when definitions of femininity were being challenged from many different directions, women, together with an emerging industry, invented, debated, criticized, and celebrated an entirely new category of women's clothing. The physicality of newly popular sports demanded a genre of costume that would challenge prevailing ideas of decorum and women's fragility. Through the process of inventing and adapting clothing to suit new activities, both women and the fashion industry helped to produce a new conception of what it meant to be feminine.

This essay will explore the role of invention and negotiation in the development of a new category of clothing. It argues that the novelty and marginality of clothing for sports provided a space in which women contested notions of "feminine" and "appropriate" bodies, behavior, and appearances. Using sources such as sewing patterns, surviving garments, magazine articles, and advertisements, I will suggest that an interactive relationship between producers and consumers

emerged in which the choices women made helped reinvent turn-of-the-century femininity.

The cultural climate of the late ninteenth and early twentieth centuries heightened awareness of changing gender ideals. One aspect of this climate was a growing acceptance of women's participation in athletics and physical culture and a gradual rethinking of the meanings attached to the female body and womanhood. A new understanding of health and leisure, while tempered with caution, informed ideas of proper female behavior. Middle-class observers—the cultural rule-makers—now accepted women at beaches, in single-sex gymnasiums, on the recently invented bicycle, playing tennis, golf, fencing, and walking in the woods. Though once discouraged, girls now were encouraged to be "athletic" and seized opportunities to play and exercise at schools, playgrounds, and settlement houses. This new physical culture infused and informed the emerging concept of the "New Woman."[2]

Athletics and leisure challenged ideas of gentility and female delicacy as they offered new arenas for women to find personal satisfaction. Moreover, while affluent and middle-class women had the most time for sports, this athleticism was accessible to working-class women as well. As these new activities redefined notions of propriety, some of the distinctions between white, middle-class women and the working women against whom they had defined their respectability were challenged.

Many women found that their clothing did not accommodate these new activities, and so embraced a series of innovations that defined a new form of clothing that was appropriate yet practical.[3] Unlike the dress reform movement, marginalized since its beginnings in the 1840s and 1850s, clothing for sports engaged a wide variety of women in a discussion about their relationship with their garments. At a time when mainstream women rarely challenged fashion's dictates, the novelty of sports offered an opportunity to rethink women's clothing. Meanwhile, the idea that the clothes were only for play made them less of a threat to anyone who perceived them as challenging traditional women's styles. Embodied in the new activities and the clothing worn for them was a new but problematic concept of femininity, one that did not hide but instead celebrated women's bodies and opened new arenas for women's participation in public life. As women considered what *they* thought was appropriate, useful, and comfortable, as they read magazines describing the clothing, as they chose patterns and sewed garments, and as they wore the garments to participate in new leisure activities, they both questioned and embraced inherited ideas of what it meant to be female.

A variety of businesses engaged in this debate. Magazine articles asked what made a good sports outfit, offered a variety of options, and acknowledged the sometimes conflicting issues of comfort, aesthetics,

and modesty. Ready-to-wear catalogs insisted *their* bathing suits wouldn't *dare* cling. Advertisers played with language and imagery that associated their clothing with women's liberation. Meanwhile, pattern makers sold patterns designed to be interpreted in different ways, allowing readers to create their own definitions of what was appropriate and feminine.

All forms of women's clothing reflected cultural shifts and tensions as middle-class women moved from domestic to more public roles. Yet sports clothing is especially interesting because of its close relationship with changing ideas of the female body as well as with women's participation in leisure activity that undercut prevailing domestic norms. Clothing for sports functioned as a middle ground between the "New Woman," who was economically independent, physically active, and sexually autonomous, and older ideals of femininity.

The rules for "acceptable" clothing for sports changed over time, until a relatively uniform idea of sports clothing emerged in the 1920s. With this near-consensus came both the most revealing sports and mainstream clothing ever worn in America—along with a very different concept of femininity. The ideological shift from "Victorian" to "modern" cultural values included a rethinking of the outward manifestations of gender. Perhaps sports clothing actually caused this larger change, as some historians have proposed, but I do not seek to establish causality.[4] What I will argue is that clothing for sports offers a unique way to understand this cultural transformation. Clothing for bicycling, swimming, walking, and gymnastics provided a space where women actively contested and rethought femininity.

Because I am interested largely in the *process* of fashioning this new way of thinking, the actual design, feel, and construction of garments are as important to the story as are the magazines that discussed and promoted them. Moreover, the means by which women interpreted styles can be understood as participation in this renegotiation of gender. Did women sew or purchase the items they read about? Did they make modifications? How did the construction and material of the garments affect how they were received? In time, how did the move to ready-made garments change this process?

This era's mainstream fashionable clothing provides the context for understanding the turn-of-the-century discussion over clothing for sports. Women's clothing in the late nineteenth century was hardly conducive to even the gentlest of physical activity. The popular silhouette of the 1870s and 1880s included floor-length skirts worn over petticoats or hoops, often drawn tightly across the front and gathered in the back in a bustle that emphasized a woman's curves. Collars were high and sleeves were long and tight. Women wore boned corsets that emphasized their breasts and hips. By the 1890s, shoulders swelled

with the giant poufs of "leg-of-mutton" sleeves, and while skirts lost bustles they remained long. Depending on their occupation, working women were less likely to wear tight corsets or heels when on the job, but as historians Kathy Peiss, Elizabeth Ewen, and Nan Enstad have suggested, many went to great effort and expense to buy or sew fashionable styles.[5]

Clothes were the insignia of women's respectability. Women were supposed to be delicate, curvy, and soft—and hidden by yards of fabric. One reason middle-class observers often portrayed poorer women, both white and African-American, as morally slack was because their finances did not allow for suitable clothing.[6] Moreover, physical labor did not always allow women to wear corsets, which to some implied a certain laxness or even easier sexual access.[7] For those who could afford more than a few outfits, complex rules governed what was to be worn when and where. Modesty was paramount. Most middle-class women would rarely expose even their arms, at least during the daytime, and it was considered rather shocking to show an ankle. Pants were associated with dress reformers, children, laborers, and even prostitutes.

Women rarely questioned these designs and expectations. Those who did were often dress reformers or proponents of "rational" dress, whom mainstream writers considered marginal, even radical. Reformers criticized tight corsets and long skirts, which they saw as restrictive, dangerous, and unsanitary, citing examples of women tripping over skirts, going up in flames, and sweeping street debris into their homes. The dress reform movement, spearheaded by Amelia Bloomer in the mid-nineteenth century, was associated with the Women's Rights movement; early feminists sometimes wore the "Bloomer costume" of long, full pants and a knee- or calf-length skirt. Often ridiculed, reform clothing represented a threat to gender distinctions held by both men and women.[8] Cartoons lampooned "Bloomer girls," showing a woman in bloomers involved in masculine work, while her husband, emasculated, wore a dress and cared for children or cooked. Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, a dress reformer and novelist in the 1870s, acknowledged how women felt threatened by suggestions for change, seeing in reform dress an erosion of respectability and gender distinction. She wrote that: "[t]hrough your vaguest suggestion as to the healthful-ness of shoulder-straps, she sees herself walking up the aisle at church in the scantest of bloomers, and a stovepipe hat."[9] With notions of gender so deeply embedded in clothing, changes in styles portended changes in the social structure.

The emerging interest in physical culture proved a serious threat to a fragile gender structure, not only because of the physicality and mobility of new sports but also due to the form of new clothing styles.

The popularity of sports in the late ninteenth century grew from a long history. Trips to the seaside and hot springs, footraces, and riding and walking for pleasure had been popular among colonists (and then Americans) since the eighteenth century, as they were in England and Europe. More organized and "scientific" activity arrived, in the form of games with strict rules or timed races, with the Industrial Revolution and urbanization. German and Swedish immigrants brought with them gymnastics methods and established men's exercise clubs. "Mixed" or coed bathing became acceptable in the 1840s and 1850s, as resort areas such as Cape May and Newport became vacation destinations; and bathing was, as one historian describes, "transformed from a medicinal treatment to a pleasurable pursuit."[10]

However, as sports became increasingly accepted, women were often excluded due to "separate sphere" gender ideals. Whereas middle-class masculinity was predicated largely on being socially dominant and competitive, middle-class femininity became defined by domesticity.[11] These social ideals informed physical ones; what Lois Banner calls the "Steel Engraving Lady" ideal—with her "delicate constitution," pale skin, birdlike bones, sloping shoulders, and narrow waist—embodied Victorian femininity.[12] Some also thought sports threatened (middle-class) women's reproductive functions. Doctors warned of collapsed uteri or other "female complaints," advising that too much activity, physical or mental, would sap women of their limited supply of vitality.[13] Moreover, propriety demanded that women not expose their bodies, even their ankles. Thus up to the 1860s or so, women's "respectable" sports and exercise could find an outlet only in croquet, archery, or calisthenics. Even seaside bathing, rarely strenuous in the first place, required elaborate "bathing machines" in which elite women would change clothing and be transported to the water.

Even as sports and "physical culture" for women became increasingly accepted, they remained problematic. Although some experts encouraged women to exercise, others warned of its dangers. Well into the twentieth century, magazine articles that praised healthy "modern girls" would in the same breath ask "Are athletics a menace to motherhood?" Too much exercise, especially unsupervised, could threaten a girl's future health and fertility; the "free out-of-door life, so priceless when properly conducted, may prove to be the path to pain and weakness, if not to permanent invalidism."[14]

At the very least, writers argued, too much sports could leave women with masculinized bodies. Contemporary fiction and magazine articles indicated a fear that sports would masculinize women, either in specific physical ways or by means of subtle behavioral changes. In Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence,* set in the 1870s, a society matron complains that a younger woman's hand is large (and by implication,

masculine) due to "these modern sports that spread the joints."[15] Either in self-defense or because they had invested in the same values, exercise proponents eagerly assured readers that athletic women would not develop hard muscles or other "masculine" traits. An 1890 article promoting fencing warned against the dangers of too much tennis, claiming that among tennis aficionados: "big, knotty biceps are found to have become all too prominent in a white, rounded arm, and gloves for the left hand refuse to fit over the broadened palm."[16] Another article glowingly praised a new women's health club but quickly assured readers that the club's gymnastics instructor was "not at all the typical athlete, with specimen biceps and iron integuments, according to the popular notion, but a thoroughly womanly and refined personality," thereby implying that she would teach with moderation and not threaten the femininity of her pupils.[17]

Yet the concern for women's health could also serve as an argument for greater acceptance of women's participation in sports. In 1850 the *Massachusetts Teacher* warned that girls would not be "fit" mothers if they did not exercise.[18] Proponents of calisthenics such as Catharine Beecher claimed that exercises such as gentle stretches and push-ups against a table would render women healthier for childbirth and housework. Etiquette books proposed that mild exercise was good for women's health; one manual from the 1860s claimed that "[c]alisthenics, and the Indian sceptre, as taught on the improved scale by our present professors, are also highly beneficial as exercises," and that "ladies of every age" who participated "gained increased strength and stature, improved the state of their health, and added grace, ease, and firmness to their motions."[19] Exercise was therefore acceptable as long as it promoted health and preserved feminine qualities such as grace and posture; it might even encourage a "rosy glow" that would make young women more attractive to appropriate men.

Despite such fears, during the 1870s and 1880s, schools and colleges began to teach physical education, and seaside and mountain vacations became more affordable. By the 1890s, innovations such as the bicycle became wildly popular. A day trip to the beach was accessible to people of all income levels—contemporary articles about Coney Island described how both rich and poor enjoyed the beaches (although they did note a "descending scale of fashion" among the beach resorts)—while private gyms and colleges were more middle- and upper-class oriented.[20] Although a special outfit for a private gym was more a middle-class concern, working women who went to Coney Island also sewed, purchased, or even rented bathing suits. The ideas of femininity and respectability central to white, middle-class ideology therefore affected any woman who joined in the discussion over clothing for sports.

Sports became increasingly associated with ideas of modernity. Athletics offered new sources of personal gratification and social interaction based more on consumption and entertainment than on production and traditional class and family ties. Charles Dana Gibson, illustrator of the famous "Gibson girl" images that epitomized for many Americans the "New Woman" and who in his illustrations often critiqued Victorian control of women, frequently portrayed women involved in sports. The "New Woman" had become heavily intertwined with the new physical culture.

As sports and leisure became increasingly common, women began to ask what could be worn to preserve modesty and femininity, yet allow for ease of movement and comfort. While mainstream clothing changed slowly, clothing for sports, in its specificity and novelty, was open for debate. Moreover, given its marginality, it was considerably less threatening. Starting around the 1870s and accelerating through the turn of the century, cultural vehicles such as magazines and etiquette books recognized that sports required a rethinking of clothing design. Articles in mainstream publications asked what women should wear for specific activities (an extension of what affluent women had already done for decades with their morning, afternoon, and evening dresses, for example), and fashion magazines offered suggestions and images. Meanwhile, schools and clubs proposed their own uniforms, and etiquette writers, dress reformers, fiction writers, and sports enthusiasts joined the discussion.

While magazines are often perceived as vehicles for prescriptive information, they can also serve as an arena to discuss cultural change. From general-interest magazines such as *Scribner's Monthly* to "women's" magazines such as *Ladies' Home Journal* to the topic-specific *Outing*, magazines presented an important dimension of a larger discourse about the future of American culture, health, femininity, and representation.[2] On a more practical level, at a time when many women still made much of their own clothing or paid a seamstress to make it for them, magazines and paper pattern designers offered patterns and instructions for new styles. When more clothing became available ready-made, retailers advertised endless permutations of gymnasium and bicycling clothing, and catalogs sold more models of bathing suits as the years went on. These magazines therefore both raised the question of what was appropriate, and suggested how to make and wear these new and alien garments. Still, because of the garments' novelty, there was no *one* way to think of them. Through a process of discussion and direction, the magazines helped form a new understanding of women's clothing.

Some articles raised the issue of how the new styles were improvements upon older garments. Others asked outright how to fashion new