

LOOKING GOOD/FEELING GOOD: ETHNOGRAPHY OF COSMETIC TRACE ITEMS FOUND IN REFUSE DATA

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Synopsis

Cosmetic use by women forms a part of the instantiation of the social-self. Refuse studies have gained momentum as more accurate indicators of behavior than data from informant recall or intimate self-revelation. Cosmetics as rare-item discards have behavioral inference value in studies designed to detail specific use indicators on a multi-nation scale for adaptation of applied techniques to fit current local images of female. Comparative refuse data may aid design and marketing strategies as well.

Women were interviewed from southwestern United States metropolitan areas. The Tucson Garbage Project supplied cosmetic item discard data from economic strata comparable to the women over a 15 year period for contrast with ethnographic recall data.

Riassunto

L'uso che le donne fanno dei cosmetici fa parte del processo di adeguamento del Sè sociale ad un modello. Gli studi sui rifiuti si sono imposti come indicatori comportamentali più precisi rispetto ai dati forniti dalla rievocazione informante e dalla rivelazione del Sè intimo. I cosmetici, considerati come rifiuti di articoli di uso non comune, hanno capacità di deduzione comportamentale negli studi diretti ad ottenere un quadro dettagliato di indicatori d'uso specifici su scala multinazionale ai fini dell'adeguamento delle tecniche applicate alle immagini correnti della donna in un dato luogo.

I dati comparativi sui rifiuti possono anche essere utili alla elaborazione delle strategie di progettazione e marketing.

Lo studio prevedeva l'intervista di donne provenienti da aree metropolitane nel sud-ovest degli Stati Uniti. Nell'arco di 15 anni il "Tucson Garbage Project" ha fornito dati sui rifiuti costituiti da cosmetici provenienti da strati economici confrontabili con le donne intervistate, al fine di contrapporli ai dati etnografici ricavati dalla rievocazione.

Refuse data was selected as an indicator of cosmetic fashion and use-trends that image the US woman because it does not involve personal recall of intimate information that many American women may be hesitant to share because of its feminist association with vanity and idleness. Refuse research has been cited as providing more accurate indicators of human behavior (Wallendorf & Wilson 1986) than interview or survey recall methods.

This study culled discard cosmetics item remains from designated garbage collection areas over a fifteen-year period in the city of Tucson, Arizona. Compiling individual year collection data to formulate a use factor for comparison of representative socio-economic areas and logging cosmetic discards per household support the conclusion that women have adjusted their physical appearance to conform to changing conceptions of female image and feminine physical appearance. Review of historical print media and ethnography provide further reinforcement of this conclusion.

DATA SOURCES

As students of this idiom of bodily expression, cosmetic consultants and consumers of cosmetic application instruction were chosen as ethnographic informants on cosmetic use in women's everyday lives. Cosmetic item discards were selected as potential indicators of use, color-preference, and fashion surge trends for the study population over an extended period of time. Advertising and fashions trends literature on these elements was also scanned.

METHOD

Ethnography recorded women's cosmetic preparation area types, products, tools and actual application processes. A makeup process questionnaire determined the number of items by cosmetic category used in one cosmetics application session and the sequence of each wo-

man's makeup routine.

Women informants were ranked by household income level into low, middle, and high income strata. Cosmetic items from like income neighborhoods were selected from project data files (Rathje 1991) using the household as the basic unit of inquiry from 1976-1991 for possible use-trend variations by socio-economic class, by year, and by cosmetic color-fashion over this fifteen year time frame. Information obtained could then be compared by socioeconomic groups by first computing the total number of artifact finds and dividing this figure by the number of household pick-ups that contained cosmetic discards. This total was then divided by the total number of household collections in that tract for a given year. For example, 8 cosmetic items found in 7 of 44 household trash pick-ups in that tract during the year yielded a consumption or "use factor" of 0.026. A socioeconomic representative collection-section was selected in low, middle, and high income neighborhoods for comparison with ethnographic data from subjects in like economic levels (Table One). The ethnographic data, in turn, supplied recall cosmetic-use information for comparison with behavioral inferences gleaned from trace measures found in the refuse data (Wallendorf & Nelson 1986).

RESULTS

The 12 ethnographic subject fell as follows within the three income groups of under \$20,000 per year (4), \$20 to \$40,000 (3), and over \$40,000 per year (5). Table One shows the "use-factor" calculated from cosmetic item discard in three refuse tract populations comparable with these three categories of household income. In some years no representative economic strata was available in the refuse data. This is indicated by (—) for that level in that year. (table I)

Table I
DISCARD FACTORS BY SOCIO-ECONOMIC NEIGHBORHOODS

YEAR	INCOME LEVEL		
	LOW	MIDDLE	HIGH
1976	0.026	0.034	0.029
1977	0.023	0.032	0.026
1978	0.008	0.050	0.034
1979	0.049	0.089	0.060
1980	0.045	0.045	0.125
1981	0.066	0.103	0.222
1982	0.050	0.072	0.143
1983	0.050	0.044	0.100
1984	0.050	0.128	0.000
1985*	0.074	0.273	0.227
1986	0.042	0.050	0.104
1987	0.138	0.069	--
1988	0.066	--	--
1989	0.063	0.033	--
1990*	0.200	0.105	0.091
1991	0.010	--	--

TABLE I. The column on the left reflects the year these data were collected. The three columns on the right reflect the discard rate of cosmetic items for that year in a representative collection tract for the income range designated at the top of the column. Discard (use or consumption) figures were calculated by taking the total number of items remaining after non-daily body decoration products and tools were eliminated and dividing it by the total number of household pickups that contained cosmetic items. This figure was then divided by the total number of pickups in that tract for the entire year: i.e. Tract 11 (low income), Year 76=8 items in 7 of 44 pickups for 0.026 (—) indicates no data were available for neighborhoods in that economic group for that year.

Two surges in discard rate of cosmetic items are noted. The year 1985 shows an increase in cosmetic item discard, particularly for the middle and upper income populations. A second cosmetic-item-find surge is noted in 1990, most notably in low and middle income populations. (tableII)

In the survey each woman listed the items she used in her daily makeup routine by product type such as eye color, lip color and hair care, often using more than one product in each category. The mean number of products used on the

hair was 1.75 and on the face was 14. The ranges for number of products used were 1-3 on the hair and 5-23 on the face. The median number of products used on the face was 13.

Makeup appliances recorded included a 20-year-old retractable lipstick brush, \$15.00 small, sable brushes, lash curlers, eyebrow combs, a mirror that responded with a wolf-whistle when gazed into, mechanical pencils, lighted mirrors, and a photography flood light.

Often makeup was put on at ritual-like altars such as a handmade desk with specialized lighting, a wire and glass frame vanity with mat-

Table II
SAMPLE OF SPECIFIC ITEM DISCARD SHOWING GROUP DISCARD PATTERN

YR	TR	HHID	NPP	ITEMS	FLOZ	SOOZ	PRICE	WA	BRAND	TYPE	MAT
78	19	783893	94	1	1.0	0.0	0.00	0	Eaudetoi	Cologne	DA
78	19	785392	94	1	0.0	0.0	0.00	0	Revson	Blush	D
78	19	785393	94	1	2.3	0.0	6.50	0	Norell	Cologne	A
78	19	785393	94	1	0.0	0.0	0.00	0	Elisabeth	Brush	D
78	19	785993	94	2	0.0	6.2	0.00	0	Raindeso	Suntancr	CD
78	19	787492	94	4	0.0	0.0	0.00	0		Pads	T
78	19	788291	94	1	32.0	0.0	1.49	0	Listerin	Mouthwash	A
78	19	788292	94	1	0.0	16.0	1.19	0	Walgreen	Petrojel	DR
78	19	788293	94	1	2.0	0.0	0.00	0	Esteelau	Creme	D
78	19	788293	94	1	0.0	0.0	0.00	0	Moondrop	Lipstick	DB
78	19	788293	94	1	0.0	0.0	0.00	0	Esteelau	Mascara	DB
78	19	788293	94	1	0.0	0.0	0.00	0	Moondrop	Lipstick	DB
78	19	788293	94	1	0.0	0.0	0.00	0	Savant	Cologne	A
78	19	788293	94	1	1.0	0.0	0.00	0	Redken	Haircond	D
78	19	788293	94	1	0.0	0.3	0.00	0	Tussy	Mascara	ED
78	19	788293	94	1	8.0	0.0	0.00	0	Chantill	Cologne	ED
78	19	788293	94	1	1.0	0.0	0.29	0	Rosemilk	Skincreme	D
78	19	788293	94	1	0.0	0.5	0.00	4	Queenhel	Beautycr	D
78	19	788293	94	1	0.5	0.0	0.00	0	Purfmagi	Mascara	D
78	19	788293	94	1	0.0	0.0	0.00	0	Cutex	Lipstick	DB
78	19	788293	94	1	0.0	0.0	0.00	0	Lipquenc	Lipstick	B
78	19	788293	94	1	0.4	0.0	0.00	0	Maxilash	Mascara	D
78	19	788293	94	1	1.0	0.0	0.00	0	Windsong	Bathoil	ED
78	19	788293	94	1	0.5	0.0	0.00	0	Puremagi	Mascara	D
78	19	788294	94	1	6.0	0.0	0.00	0	Caron	Baby lotion	ED
78	19	788294	94	1	0.0	0.0	0.00	0	Revon	Manicure	A
78	19	788891	94	1	0.0	0.6	0.00	0	Revlon	Compact	DBE
78	19	788891	94	1	0.0	4.0	4.00	0	Helenaru	Base	A
78	19	788891	94	1	3.0	0.0	1.70	0	Clariol	Hairdye	A
78	19	788994	94	1	24.0	0.0	1.99	0	Listermi	Mouthwash	ED
78	19	789695	94	1	3.5	0.0	0.00	0	Vaseline	Creme	D
78	19	789995	94	1	0.0	0.0	0.00	0		Emeryboard	A
78	19	790391	94	1	0.0	0.4	0.00	0	Norell	Cologne	EB

TABLE II. This table is a representative data set from the Tucson Garbage Project at the University of Arizona in the year 1978 in tract 19. The designations are from left to right: year, tract, ID number of that specific pickup, number of pickups per year, number of items of that category, fluid ounces, solid ounces, price, waste, brand, type, and material content of item or its packaging. This table shows how many items were found per household pickup as each item found in a specific pickup has the same ID number in column three: see number 788293 as an example.

ching chair, and marbled counter tops with triofold display mirrors and an intricate array of products and tools.

New offerings of health and beauty products numbering 1,614 were made to American consumers in 1991 alone (Statistical Abstract 1992). Faludi (1991) asserts that at work is a reconstruction of female gender identity in which women themselves are taking an active part. Makeup application and dress, as female social-identity display (Wiessner 1984), engages individual women daily in the creation of a self-fashioned social persona (Goffman 1959).

Similarly, a brief survey of literature on fashionable female images, makeup trends, and beauty product sales revealed changing conceptions of "Looking Good/Feelin Good" that correspond to the two surges in cosmetic discard for 1985 and 1990 noted in the refuse data above (Table One).

To be chic in the seventies was to portray masculinized conceptions of competence upon female bodies (Faludi 1991). Women in the United States wore bright covering, mask-like makeup (Facing Up 1991, Goffman 1979). Women assumed masculine notions of competence, reasoned judgment, and efficiency in the wearing of pallid clothing hues in a subdued dressing style. Popular femininity became a characterization of masculine dressing-for-success style (Malloy 1977).

In contrast, stiletto heels, frills, bows, cabbage roses, bell skirts, and the Victorian-girl look pitched nostalgia and high femininity as the attire for modern American women of the eighties (Faludi 1991).

Thus, the exuberant make-up colors of the seventies gave way to the pallor of the eighties and then to the earth images and shades of the nineties (Ferry 1991; Facing Up 1991). Cosmetics of the nineties fashion literature enhance as "pretty", as "looking/good/feeling good", the natural attributes of women.

DISCUSSION

Specialized appliance and products, as in most ritual activity (Douglas & Isherwood 1983), were used in daily makeup applications to instantiate the individual woman within the desired social order/norms (Douglas 1966). It is the physicality of these artifacts themselves, rather than conceptualization, that aids the work of ritual actions (Bourdieu 1982; Connerton 1989; Miller 1987) providing magical empowerment and projection of the culturally defined female image.

Women used makeup to embody themselves as persons of competence and status. "I feel better looking like I belong in the business world", stated one woman. A post-surgical patient was seeking to draw attention away from the asymmetry of her mouth so as to establish herself as competent in reference to her work. "I wear makeup and put others at ease... I want a certain presence".

Other women described the persona created through makeup as a social strategy. "... if you look good, the jobs are open to you". "Makeup makes one more confident".

Key issues of acceptance, esteem, and status form the core incentives in interpersonal interaction (Aronoff & Wilson 1985; Goffman 1959). Makeup and other components of dress and ornamentation (Brown 1990; Comaroff 1992) are means of projecting social identity as well as active tools in social strategies to gain desired personal outcomes (Weissner 1984; Goffman 1967).

Refuse research contributes to observations, ethnography, and survey sources of data. By selecting residential tracts comparable with the income levels, of informants it is possible to follow both data sources over time. I speculated that use, color, and fashion trends could be culled from discard data and compared by income levels and that refuse trace data may provide more accurate descriptives than singular reliance upon personal-recall surveys, narrative data,

advertising copy.

The research sample's data does show the frequent appearance of a number of cosmetic items in one household collection. This group occurrence of discarded cosmetic items may indicate that women were following fashion trends by purchasing at one time the latest in colors of lipstick, rouge, mascara and foundation to achieve this new look. (See Table Two household collection 788293 with multiples of lipstick and mascara items).

Also discernible from the refuse data is that cosmetics were found in the discards of all socioeconomic groups in this metropolitan area over the fifteen year period. Consumption per household appears to have increased from the mid seventies through the early eighties, the period during which the most extensive data are available. Thereafter, using the more limited data samples, a surge in consumption based on the rate of discard per tract per year was shown in the years 1985 and 1990. Comparably, beginning in 1990, according to fashion literature and ethnography informants, a color and image shift in body decoration did occur.

There were, however, factors that impacted the certitude of the descriptive value of this refuse data. Colors of cosmetic items were frequently not recorded. Thus, it could not be seen through the refuse data alone if products flowed from the dark, mask-like covering makeup of the seventies to the more natural products and colors of the nineties reported by my informants and supported by print media sources.

Because of changes in garbage collection containers, routes, and collection methods, the same tracts could not be followed for each year. In the later years, fewer tracts were sampled and fewer samples were taken per tract, leading to possible decreased accuracy of discard rates per household due to the fewer number of collections available.

CONCLUSION

The general finding in the refuse data of frequent multiple rare-item discard pattern lends standing and import to group replacement of cosmetics as reflective of cultural changes in conceptions of female identity while the yearly "use-factors" support the timing of fashion trends reported in print media. Ethnographic data substantiated these broad inferences made from the cosmetic refuse findings giving this research data behavioral and trend value despite the small number of cosmetics samples available.

Refuse trace-item study carefully recording specific data details has potential for cross-cultural research. This could be more simply studied by ethnic-economic neighborhood strata rather than by household, making refuse research simultaneously applicable in multi-nation studies.

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