CRITICAL MEDIA ANALYSIS: COVERGIRL COSMETICS INTODUCES THEIR FIRST COVER BOY

Rebecca Wiltzen

HIST – Gender, Sexuality and History in Film

November 22, 2017

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder…or so they say. Over history beauty has become much less of a beheld gift and more of a hegemonic ideology of using trends and products to achieve the beauty ideal/standard (which are continuously evolving) of the current time and place. The beauty industry has predominately been aimed at female consumers and has existed for hundreds of years. Geoffrey Jones from his book, “*Beauty Imagined: A History of the Global Beauty Industry”* highlights the pivotal moments in history such as World War I, the Great Depression and the introduction of the television and how that has changed, shaped and created the beauty industry that we know today. With brands such as CoverGirl Cosmetics dominating the industry it’s easy to track those evolving beauty ideals/standards with a more micro lens. In a recent pivotal moment in CoverGirl Cosmetics newest campaign, Lash Equality, they’ve shifted the standards of the beauty right in front of our eyes. They have done this by introducing Charles James – the first CoverBoy.[[1]](#footnote-1) But how have men emerged in a very female dominated industry? R.W. Connell from his work, “Politics of Changing Men” explains that this movement began when, “the technological conditions for the equality of the sexes [had] existed, and the change of consciousness had arrived.”[[2]](#footnote-2) In another sense, not only was the beauty industry and cosmetic companies changing and evolving but masculinity was changing as well. This paper is aimed at using the macro lens of Jones’ work, the more micro lens of Covergirl Cosmetics and exploring the history of masculinity to trace how the beauty industry and the ideals and standards, which exist in it, have been evolving through history to where we are today: open acceptance of men in makeup.

From the beauty industry, we can understand how, as a global industry, it has shaped what we understand to be beauty today. It began with simply being able to see yourself. Moving from candle light to gas to electricity, increased one’s self-awareness like never before thus creating ample opportunity for industries to use this awareness to their advantage.[[3]](#footnote-3) Makeup, once referred to as “face painting,” was commonly correlated with prostitutes and actresses, and for men; effeminacy and homosexuality.[[4]](#footnote-4) It wasn’t until “the late ninetieth century that sales of cosmetics by prestigious fragrance houses…encouraged the association of cosmetics with fashion.” After World War I, when the beauty industry began to boom in America, the ideal/standard at the time was associated with “smelling and looking ‘clean.’”[[5]](#footnote-5) The market for men was small and to dissociate from ideologies of effeminacy it was advertised to emphasize masculinity, such as “He-man, made for men, Mascu-line, etc.”[[6]](#footnote-6) Moving forward in time, the great depression devastated the beauty industry. Sales in America plummeted from “$193 million in 1929 to $97 million in 1933.”[[7]](#footnote-7) Despite this however, the “consumer culture remained stubbornly in place” moving us to the age of the television.[[8]](#footnote-8) Television brought about a new way to advertise, broadcast and diffuse Hollywood’s fashion and celebrities. This allowed for a hegemonic beauty standard/ideal in the Western world to be that of young women with focus on “white people’s features” such as skin and hair. For men, the beauty industry was motionless but for women it was full speed ahead.[[9]](#footnote-9) The cultural ideology in America and the beauty standard/ideal at the time (1960s) was that of women “rarely set[ing] foot out of their doors without make-up.”[[10]](#footnote-10) Globalization is what came next. Brands began expanding globally thus creating a shared consumer culture and identity.[[11]](#footnote-11) In 1992 there was a push from age (youthfulness) to self-esteem as being a determinant of beauty allowing for a broader consumer audience. Now, there is also an emphasis on incorporating men into the beauty industry, made possible by “social changes and generational shifts.”[[12]](#footnote-12) This sets the tone for the new beauty standards/ideals which CoverGirl Cosmetics will elaborate on below.

CoverGirl Cosmetics got its start in 1960 and quickly thereafter became highly successful.[[13]](#footnote-13) One of their first campaigns was called “Clean Makeup” and emphasized that of the a natural, clean and medicated makeup look.[[14]](#footnote-14) This is parallel to the standards at this time that Jones discusses above. These campaigns featured predominately white, blond hair, blue eyed young woman as it was believed that this look emphasized the image of ‘clean.’[[15]](#footnote-15) It wasn’t until the 2000s that Cover Girl Cosmetics began diversifying. A pivotal moment at this time was when they introduced Queen Latifah, a coloured, comical, spokesperson who set the stage for a new image for cosmetics.[[16]](#footnote-16) This strayed from their typical model-type look and began its stage for a new era of beauty standards and ideals. Furthermore, in 2011, Cover Girl Cosmetics hired Ellen DeGeneres. This too, was a pivotal moment for this company as Ellen not only “undercuts the gender ideology from which cosmetic advertising has always spoken” but she is openly gay, therefore challenging the hegemonic culture of sexuality in our society and in the beauty industry as well.[[17]](#footnote-17) Moving forward to just last year in 2016 CoverGirl Cosmetics launched their “Lash Equality” Campaign. This was a major step forward as they introduced for the first time a Cover Boy: James Charles.[[18]](#footnote-18) As society develops and evolves so does the beauty industry and what we are seeing now is the result of the dialectic relationship between beauty standards/ideals and technology. As Valeriya Safronovaoct from New York Times explains, “In beauty, [a group of young men](http://www.marieclaire.com/beauty/a20197/the-beauty-boys-of-instagram/) have made their way into the industry through a grass-roots entrepreneurial effort entrenched in YouTube, Instagram, Twitter and Snapchat. With devoted followings, they have carved out a space to experiment and expand the notion of being male.”[[19]](#footnote-19) As society evolves we see a shift in the beauty industry, cosmetics and the beauty standards/ideals that exist in it. Today, in a diversified and open space such as that of the internet and social media we are also able to see a shift in what is means to be beautiful as well as a challenging of the hegemonic gender ideologies, specifically masculinity, and what is means to be a man in the beauty world.

But how does masculinity impact one’s involvement in the beauty industry? To better understand this one must first explore masculinity in itself. R.W. Connell from “Politics of Changing Men” explains masculinity as, “A configuration of practice around the position of men in the structure of gender relations.”[[20]](#footnote-20) These varying types of masculinities evolve much like the beauty industry with pivotal moments in history that exist alongside it – or as a result of it. For example, through the process of globalization Connell explains that, “out the creation this global interaction, the creation of new forms of hegemonic masculinity [are possible].”[[21]](#footnote-21) It’s important to understand that masculinity can take on many forms and can vary from person to person but the general ideology of masculinity in the “rich, capitalist countries” is fairly concrete.[[22]](#footnote-22) Nonetheless, as time has evolved we now seeing that “the technological conditions for the equality of the sexes has existed, and the change of consciousness had arrived.” [[23]](#footnote-23) As a more recent example Mark Mccormack explains in "Changing Masculinities in Youth Cultures” that with the evolution of our society there is a new “Associat[ion] with dressing well, vanity, and the sexual objectification of men, metrosexuality has multiple meanings that incorporate a diverse range of masculinities.”[[24]](#footnote-24) And as masculinity shifts we also see a shift in the beauty industry to be more inclusive and representative of how our society is evolving and shifting with makeup and beauty as a vector to which these new ideals/standards are implemented. Clearly shown through CoverGirl Cosmetics newest campaign.

To conclude, the beauty industry, cosmetic companies and masculinity are continuously evolving to represent the new and current hegemonic ideologies of gender and beauty. Connell so elegantly explains, “Historical consciousness is the distinctive feature of contemporary masculinity politics and the horizon of contemporary thought on masculinity.” I believe that this goes for beauty ideals and standards as well because in understanding the history of it all (beauty industry, cosmetics and masculinity) one can better comprehend this notion of continuous fluidity, acceptance and evolution of these ideals/standards over time and space. It only takes one person to create a movement and I think that CoverGirl Cosmetics newest CoverBoy is doing just that; paving way for new gender and beauty ideologies.

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5. Jones, *Beauty Imagined,* 89. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Jones, *Beauty Imagined,* 100. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
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8. Jones, *Beauty Imagined*, 118. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
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