

## **An Ideal American Woman through the French Woman: Beauty Ads from American Magazines in the late 1950s and 1960s**

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### **Résumé**

Cet article se propose de faire une lecture approfondie des principales publicités vantant les produits de beauté d'origine française dans la presse magazine américaine des années 1950 et 1960. Il s'agira d'analyser la façon dont ces publicités créent chez les Américaines le désir d'atteindre le charme mystérieux d'une féminité française. En particulier, cet article pose trois questions : Quels sont les messages implicites de ces publicités ? Que représente la femme française symboliquement dans le mécanisme de consommation des produits de beauté des femmes américaines ? Plus important encore, quelles sont les fonctions des qualités de la femme française dans la culture américaine pendant cette période ? Afin de mieux contextualiser la synthèse de ces questions, l'article retrace d'abord l'évolution de la publicité américaine de la fin des années 1950 aux années 1960. Ensuite, on analysera les stratégies publicitaires mises en place pour séduire les consommatrices américaines. Enfin, il s'agira de comprendre comment la « magie » de la publicité est fondée sur l'idéologie capitaliste.

### **Abstract**

Through a close reading of prominent beauty advertisements for French beauty products found in popular American magazines in the late 1950s and 1960s, this article explores how French-themed beauty advertisements work to create a desire in American women to become a certain French feminine mystique. In particular, this article poses three questions: What were the implicit messages of magazine advertisements featuring French women? What desires and symbolic qualities did French women represent to inspire purchases of beauty products in America? Most importantly, what purposes did appealing to these qualities have in American culture during this period? To better contextualize the synthesis of these questions, the article first examines the evolution of American advertising in the late 1950s and 1960s, advertisements' purposes in targeting American women, and the capitalist ideology built into the "magic" of advertising.

**Mots-clés :** publicités, produits de beauté, désir, imaginaire, femmes américaines, femmes françaises, années 1950, années 1960

**Keywords :** advertisements, beauty products, desire, imaginary, American women, French women, 1950s, 1960s

## **Plan**

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On the dust jacket for her popular book *Entre Nous: A Woman's Guide to Finding Her Inner French Girl*, Debra Ollivier claims to unlock “the mystery of the French girl and her secrets of self-possession” as well as American women’s ability to perfect and better themselves through this knowledge. However, such advice for American women is not a phenomenon unique to the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. As beauty products’ presence exploded in a booming mass-consumer driven post-World War II America, the French woman – as depicted mainly through French-identified beauty products – served as a regular indicator of ideal beauty for American women in print magazines. Through a close reading of the images and texts of French beauty advertisements from the popular American magazines *Life*, *Mademoiselle*, and *McCall's* in the late 1950s and 1960s, one sees how beauty advertisements have built an American desire of consuming and becoming a certain French feminine mystique.

In addition to critically analyzing key advertisements’ visual and textual elements, this paper draws upon the importance of visual advertising in the late 1950s and 1960s. This research is part of a broader project of how, why, and with what lasting influence French and American popular magazines regularly represented the American and French woman, respectively, after World War II into the 1960s. Although this paper discusses a small sampling from a larger examination of American magazines featuring and advertising French women, including *Look*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, *National Geographic*, *Reader's Digest*, *Saturday Evening Post*, *Vogue*, and *Woman's Home Companion*, the cases presented here are representative of significant treatments of the advertised French woman.

Inspired by Kristin Ross’ argument that American women were a key competitor for French women during France’s postwar reconstruction, I argue that French and American magazines represented each other’s women to rework postwar French and American perceptions of the nation and attitudes toward the Franco-American alliance<sup>1</sup>. Existing research tends to focus on the American influence in a French context; my research compares the use of French and American women in American and French cultural spaces, respectively, in the postwar period, to shape national and international definitions of femininity. In particular importance for this paper, I look to the American side of the story of how the French woman was essential in defining American femininity through consumer appeals. What were the implicit messages of these American magazine advertisements featuring French women? What desires and symbolic qualities did French women represent to inspire purchases of beauty products in America? What purposes did appealing to these qualities have in American

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<sup>1</sup> Kristin ROSS, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1996.

culture in the late 1950s and 1960s? Answers to these questions are revealed through a close reading of key advertisements from the time period. However, addressing advertising's evolution in America, how and why American women were targeted as consumers, and what purposes and meanings advertisements have will help contextualize how advertised French femininity fits into American women's visualization of potential selves and their desire to be (and purchase) a certain French beauty ideal.

## **Advertising in the United States**

The post-World War II period, particularly from the late 1940s through the 1960s saw one of the highest, most unprecedented levels of cooperation and trade between the United States and France<sup>2</sup>. It also saw unprecedented growth in incomes and spending in both countries. In the United States, with its economic engines on full speed during and after World War II, the continued rise in prosperity and wealth, the move of Americans from urban and rural areas into suburbs around major cities, and the increase in the youth population, mass consumer culture entrenched itself further into everyday American life. Although it was difficult to transition from a Depression-era culture of restraint, necessity, and saving to one of more free purchases, entertainment, and credit, as George Lipsitz (2001) and Lynn Spigel (1992) note, the role of popular media and advertisements helped make this more palatable, especially for older and first-generation immigrant Americans.

Richard Ohmann (1996) and Jackson Lears (1994) discuss mass mediated advertising in America as being born mainly in the late nineteenth century as a way to market and sell the surplus of new products that came about through the rise of industrialization. As more Americans moved to cities to work, there was more disposable income among Americans to buy more products, so modern advertising in mass circulating magazines was born to fill the need to inform readers of products to buy. Modern American advertising first generally started with a more rationalist and scientific style to reassure customers how and why purchasing a product brought desirable results and was acceptable and sensible to purchase. However, by the late 1950s and early 1960s, the rise of youth culture disenchanted with mass conformism, appreciated a new style and approach to advertising, which Thomas Frank describes as the advertising of "cool"<sup>3</sup>. Rather than focusing on the technical and expert qualities of items, advertisers focused on appealing to audiences through the symbolic qualities and desires that products could provide. Advertisements, thus, moved from minimal images with long, descriptive copy to minimal copy and vivid images. There are many underlying functions of advertising that play out through the combination of words and images, but to better understand these purposes in relation to the advertisements of French

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<sup>2</sup> See Victoria DE GRAZIA, *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance through Twentieth Century Europe*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2006; Richard KUISEL, *Seducing the French: The Dilemma of Americanization*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1997; Brian MCKENZIE, *Remaking France: Americanization, Public Diplomacy, and the Marshall Plan*, New York, Berghahn Books, 2005; Charles SOWERWINE, *France since 1870: Culture, Society and the Making of the Republic*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009; Irwin WALL, *The United States and the Making of Postwar France, 1945-1954*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991.

<sup>3</sup> See Thomas FRANK, *Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1997.

women, reviewing the place of American women as consumers in the postwar period through the 1960s is needed first.

## **American Women as Consumers of and for the Family and Nation**

The place of women in the United States after World War II can be described as advancing toward equality yet incredibly ambivalent at best. Betty Friedan's seminal 1963 publication of the *Feminine Mystique* critiqued the male-dominating nature of American society as seen in Frankenstein-like women's magazines, but despite this advance in feminist critique and American women's experience of taking on full-time work outside of the home or participating in war efforts, once the war ended, many middle class American women saw their place being forced back into the home or taking on "traditional" female work, such as assistants and providing domestic services. As Elaine Tyler May (1999) argues in *Homeward Bound*, the large responsibilities that came from the baby boom also limited women's abilities to continue with women's advances in the public sphere. Yet despite these changes, American women had significant control over what was purchased for the family since they did most of the shopping. Advertisements, in consequence, were largely geared toward women since they guided family spending in emerging, growing supermarkets and stores. American women were key targets for advertisements, and they came to take on the important role of consumers for the family, and by extension, the nation.

Lizabeth Cohen's work on post-WWII America from a consumer perspective sheds light on the important place of American women consumers in advancing the nation. American women were seen as influential during World War II for their roles as "the consumer" who made diligent efforts to feed, clothe, and maintain the standard of living of their families, especially those women whose husbands or significant others were serving in the military. After World War II, America saw the rise of the "purchaser as citizen" whose "personal material wants actually served the national interest," which combined two competing perspectives on consumption found before and during the war: the "consumer citizen," who was "responsible for safeguarding the general good of the nation" through sacrifice and selective choice (i.e., rationing); and the "purchaser consumer," who helped greater society by using her purchasing, rather than political, power (Cohen, 2003, 8, 18). However, the place of American women as "purchaser as citizen" was complicated by the retrenchment of middle class women into the home and the disadvantaged status of working class and minority women.<sup>4</sup> Yet despite the relative retrenchment of women's rights after World War II, women were still the largest targets for advertisements for domestic appliances, cleaning agents, and soaps since they were the users of these products and most likely the purchasers of these products on behalf of the family unit. Susan Douglas explains the important place of women as targets of postwar American advertising, particularly in maintaining America's growing consumer culture, which increasingly formed the American economy's base:

A burgeoning consumer culture needs one big thing – consumers. Consumers, of course, need money. But America's consumer culture was predicated on the notion that women were the major consumers of most goods – that was their job, after all – and that, to sell them, you had to emphasize with their roles as wives and mothers,

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<sup>4</sup> See Joanne J. MEYEROWITZ, *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1994.

because it was in these capacities, no in their capacities as secretaries or nurses, that women bought. So, to buy more things, many of our mothers had to work. To sell them, advertisers erased and diminished this fact, and stressed how many more products they needed, and how many more tasks they had to undertake with those products, to be genuinely good wives and moms. No wonder Mom was often a bit testy. Here she was, part of a system that insisted it needed her to consume inside the home but adamantly refused to admit it also needed her to produce outside the home. She was supposed to deny a central fact of her life, and she was damned for doing the very things that were keeping not just the family but the entire U.S. economy financially healthy (Douglas, 1995, 56).

The American woman, thus, was an important purchaser for maintaining the financial and familial health of the nation, and even if her political and other rights did not reflect her importance, advertisers targeted her since she had the most stakes in maintaining national order and economic progress. Although a consuming American woman helped build an economically viable nation, images and imaginaries from outside the United States, such as the French women, were used to fuel this gendered consumerism.

## **Purposes and Meanings of Advertising**

On the surface, advertisements serve the function of selling a product, but they do much more than inform and entice readers into shelling out money for particular merchandise. As Jackson Lears notes in his cultural history of American advertising, advertisements in the United States have served the purpose of massaging one's purchasing restraint to feed into the dreams and desires that advertised products can bring in a world of mass-produced abundance. These dreams and desires can be anything that will magically transform lives and selves into something that is found admirable or desirable, such as being more efficient, beautiful, healthy, or modern. Advertisements, thus, cultivate desires and are based upon the wishes of what people want to see, do, and become<sup>5</sup>. As a result, as Roland Marchand asserts similarly, but in different terms than Lears, advertisements work as "social tableaux" to reveal more than just the consumer trends of a given moment. That is, advertisements "reflect public aspirations rather than contemporary circumstances," and they "mirror popular fantasies rather than social realities" (Marchand, 1985, xvii). Therefore, looking to how American magazines' advertisements used French women lends insight into how gender and the nation were built into how Americans saw, imagined, and possibly wanted to become like the French woman.

The Marxist-inspired work of Raymond Williams helps further unpack the purposes and meanings of abundance, transformation, and fantasy in advertising. For Williams, the history of advertising organizes and reproduces society in line with capitalist forces. In an age of surplus production and plenty, such as that seen in postwar America, free market capitalism needs a way for the masses of people to continue to consume to allow the holders of capital and production to acquire and amass their wealth and power in society. Advertisements, which on the surface inform people of a product, serve the reproduction of capitalism through the creation of the need for things that are not necessary for their function. Rather, ads appeal to the desires they fill. In other words, advertisements' function is to create demand based on the desires that products could magically provide to consumers. As such, for Williams,

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<sup>5</sup> On creating desire to consume, and to become accustomed to increased abundance, see Jackson LEARS, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in the United States*, New York, Basic Books, 1994.

advertising is part of a “magical system” that “transforms commodities into glamorous signifiers (turning a car into a sign of masculinity, for instance) and these signifiers present an imaginary, in the sense of unreal, world” (During, 1999, 410). Williams’ work “disenchants capitalism” by showing that “the use value of many commodities is their signifying function,” which helps explain much of American advertisers’ move from rationalist-functionalist advertisements to “cool” advertisements in the postwar period (During, 1999, 410). As a consequence, in looking to how American magazines represented French women in beauty advertisements, one can unmask the commodity fetishes that came to build Americans’ understanding of French women, real and imaginary, and the desires and hopes advertisers tried to build into their consumerist representations to inspire women to open their pocketbooks.

Roland Barthes’ *Mythologies* adds another important layer to articulating the underlying functions and purposes of advertising by paying attention to the ideological discourses that form the “naturalness” media “constantly dress up [as] reality” through the “decorative display of *what-goes-without-saying*” (1957, 10). In other words, Barthes calls for the deconstruction of meaning that lies behind everyday texts such as advertisements. As he does in his famous essay on “The World of Wrestling,” Barthes insists on the examination of how public performances put on a show “to go exactly through the motions which are expected of [them]” (1957, 14). To extend this to mass media, magazines, like wrestlers, present the private in public and they create a theatrical display that the public generally accepts to be successful. Media dress up its representations of the world in fanciful ways that appear spontaneous, but not deviating from the “image which the public has of the great legendary themes of its mythology” (Barthes, 1957, 22). Extending Barthes’ idea to the specific task of analyzing advertisements, one realizes that she must look to the ideological rules advertisements inherit from the historical moment in which they are embedded. By bringing Barthes’ attention to the mythologies of advertising together with William’s concern for the magic advertisements hope to create, one addresses the question of what advertisements work to inspire their readers to do or imagine themselves as through their disciplining functions in line with society’s ideological structures. In other words, advertisements work to invoke unquestioned participation in a capitalist, mass consumer society through appeals to socially desirable qualities that products help readers obtain or achieve. It is true that readers can reject, resist, or alter the messages of magical transformation that adheres to societal mythologies, but advertisements attempt to achieve certain ideological ends in line with capitalist structures. On the surface, readers are lured to spend money in line with mass consumerism. However, more subtly, they are lured to do so through the acceptable desires and imaginaries society has at a given moment. In the case of American popular magazines, French women were one important desiring tool used to get readers to make purchases and accept or learn ways of how to imagine themselves in new, desirable ways.

## **Advertising the French Woman**

Perfumes and perfume making is one of France’s well-known legacies among Americans. In the October 13, 1956 edition of *Saturday Evening Post*, James P. O’Donnell describes “How the Ladies Get Their Glamour” through French perfumes and “the discerning sniffers of certain Frenchman” who help women “entice the male with perfumes more potent than Cleopatra’s or Madame Pompadour’s” (30). O’Donnell notes that while perfumes may bear a

“fancy Paris, London or New York label...the chances are that the best that is in them was born” by the perfume experts, also known as the “Noses,” in Southern France. These men’s work is “tremendous, because it is based not only on the gift of smell but on one’s supposed knowledge of the working of the feminine psyche. No man, least of all a Frenchman, is eager to deny possession of such a gift” (104). French perfume and the expertise used to create it are important tools for American women, and O’Donnell works through his extended look at the process of creating and perfecting a perfume to show that French perfume holds an important place for American women to express their femininity, attractiveness, and charm. American magazine advertisements for a wide array of French perfumes and make-ups take advantage of this cultural knowledge by drawing on the alluring, transformative qualities of Frenchwomen who use these products.

One of the assumptions behind the alluring qualities of Frenchwomen is that they have intimate knowledge of what it means to be feminine. Bourjois’ Evening in Paris line does just this through several advertisements heavily placed in *Life* magazine in 1956 and 1957. Bourjois was a make-up brand that had originally started in Paris in 1863 and had expanded its market and production to other locations, including the United States, by the 1920s. First launched in the United States in 1928, the Evening in Paris line saw much success, especially since it was seen to bring the luxury of the bourgeoisie to the middle classes<sup>6</sup>. The name of the company itself is a play off this connection, since Bourjois is pronounced phonetically the same as the word *bourgeois*. Popular French women, thus, were employed to legitimate the line’s claims to provide a beautifying transformation of its American female readers (or American male readers’ significant others) into the seductive, elusive French female.

Bourjois placed one ad repeatedly in 1957 to attest to French knowledge of fashion, perfume, and romance. The ad’s copy reads, “Take it from a true Parisian – Give Evening in Paris, advises Paris born Jean Pierre Aumont. It’s the fragrance *more* French women wear than any other . . . and the French *do* know<sup>7</sup>!” The use of the phrase “true Parisian” insinuates authenticity of the product, and by having a French insider recommend the product, it entices American women to purchase a product that could provide what was seen in the advertisement’s image – happiness and an endearing, protective male companion, which “the French *do* know” about. In this instance, just as a Bourjois fragrance speaks through its scent, the advertisement plays on the notion that the French woman comes from a culture of seduction that does not need enunciation. The advertisement assumes that American readers know that the French woman has innate knowledge of all things feminine, and by purchasing Bourjois, the American woman, too, gains access to this knowledge and power.

In other ads, Bourjois relied on Zizi Jeanmaire, a French actress and ballerina that starred in the 1956 Paramount musical film *Anything Goes*, to advise female readers to “Keep Cool as We French Do...” by buying Evening in Paris’ eau de toilette and dusting powder<sup>8</sup>. Again,

<sup>6</sup> “Histoire d’une marque,” Bourjois Paris, [http://www.bourjois.fr/home/histoire\\_d\\_une\\_marque/notre\\_histoire](http://www.bourjois.fr/home/histoire_d_une_marque/notre_histoire) (accessed 24 September 2013).

<sup>7</sup> An image of this advertisement is available in Google Books’ online archive of *Life* magazine at <http://books.google.com/books?id=x1UEAAAAMBAJ&lpg=PP1&pg=PA108>. Hereafter, similar, abbreviated references are provided as “Google Books *Life* archive.”

<sup>8</sup> Available at Google Books *Life* archive, <http://books.google.com/books?id=5kgEAAAAMBAJ&lpg=PP1&pg=PA96>.

using an authentic French insider, but this time a Frenchwoman who might have been familiar to readers following popular musicals, the Bourjois advertisement sought to draw in American women (or those who care about them) to the cool, sophisticated cosmetics that French women use. Jeanmaire even promoted Bourjois' accessibility among Americans due to the free samples the company distributes: "We French adore Evening in Paris perfume and pay good francs for it. But in America, you give it away<sup>9</sup>." Thus, built into the ad is an appeal to American readers' potential pride in the material abundance seen in the United States during the postwar years.

Yet the most significant appeal for American female readers to transform themselves to have an alluring French femininity comes in Bourjois' prominent tagline appearing throughout 1956, 1957, and 1958 in *Life*. By buying and using Bourjois perfume and deodorants, American women would be able to have a "breath of Paris about them," similar to the women shown in these ads who shout with glee in a Parisian park, gallivanting down a cobblestone street in haute couture fashions with their princely beau at their arms, or look out onto the Seine River<sup>10</sup>. The ads work to make the French woman glamorous and something American women could and should become due to their sophisticated nature that Americans imagine of and admire in French women. In particular, despite America's political and economic dominance at this time, the appeal to "old world" imagery, such as the *fin de siècle* or haute couture clothing and cobblestone streets, establishes French femininity as a locus of desire since French women know how to be sophisticated through their years of natural training in refined, feminine knowledge.

Other French beauty products that were advertised in the late 1950s evidenced increasingly provocative tones and messages in line with the move toward more "cool" advertising that had minimal copy and playful associations through words and images. Coty, a popular brand created in the 1910s by marketing-savvy Frenchman François Coty, couched itself as "the essence of beauty that is France," which several of its products defined as being appealing, daring, and enticing. In *McCall's* September 1958 issue, one such advertisement for "French Spice" describes a red lipstick to be one that "dance[s] on lips that dare to be delicious." In addition to being "the new spice in fashion's life," French Spice was magically transformative – it made those who use it ready to be more adventurous, presumably in physical manners: "And when French Spice glows on your fingertips...goes to your toes...who knows what beautiful things it can lead to!" Here, the copy is meant to reinforce an image that is often associated with French women in an American context. In the background, one sees bright yellow, red, and pink cancan dancers similar to those found in Paris' Montmartre entertainment district. The woman in the foreground wears a fur-topped dress exposing her shoulders signifying elegance and wealth. The woman's expression is one of a no nonsense attitude; it is a woman who is confident in her beauty and seductive charm. For American readers, French Spice pulls from the stereotype of the confident, boisterous, and sexual French woman in order to appeal to the daring transformation that could come from using the product.

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<sup>9</sup> Available at Google Books *Life* archive,

<http://books.google.com/books?id=Pk8EAAAAMBAJ&lpg=PP1&pg=PA146>.

<sup>10</sup> Images of these ads are respectively available at Google Books *Life* archive,

<http://books.google.com/books?id=SE8EAAAAMBAJ&lpg=PP1&pg=PA185>,

<http://books.google.com/books?id=IT8EAAAAMBAJ&lpg=PP1&pg=PA58>, and

<http://books.google.com/books?id=DFYEAAAAMBAJ&lpg=PP1&pg=PA17>.



At roughly the same time of its French Spice campaign, Coty launched its new formula for Instant Beauty. Although less provocative than its French Spice sister product, Instant Beauty makes important implications about French women and their place as a symbol of direct expertise on how to be beautiful and attractive. A majority of the page consists of a shot from what looks like a street in Paris' Latin Quarter. In the foreground is a smiling woman who looks at the reader from the side with a firm, closed smile. Behind her is an older man carrying a large bundle of French flags. The woman's bright red lips, blue eyes, and white shirt, necklace, and bandana, mark her to symbolize France's tricolor. She presumably has used Coty's Instant Beauty to give her the "Light Look" that lightly smooths on to blend into skin and banish flaws and vanish shadows and lines<sup>11</sup>. Here, the Frenchwoman comes to physically embody France through her tricolor hues and being an exemplar of French beauty for American women to be light, springy, and in line with fashions of the day. The physical transposition of France's national colors onto this light-skinned French woman presents the French woman as a purchasable symbol of the French nation and all that she stands for through the make-up she wears: being sexy yet demure, reserved yet available, and proud yet modest.

In the early 1960s, at a moment when more young women were "on the go," Coty's ad for "French Flair" worked to appeal to busy American women by being an efficient means to putting the "best face forward" while staying "lightheartedly lovely...even on busiest days." Here, an advertisement that intends to sell an ingenious make-up that is powder and foundation "Air Spun" into one insinuates that American women would be able to stay on the move while not giving up on their attractiveness like the well dressed woman featured in the advertisement who walks out of an established make-up shop with a wrapped package in hand. The French Flair image that Coty works to generate is less about the technical innovation in make-up, and more about the French woman's ability to be cool, smart, luxurious, and well put together in no time at all. For American women at this time who lived in a culture of cheap mass consumer gadgetry and conformism, they would find the elegance and sophistication of the French Flair woman to be a way to stand out from the crowd in a society that valorised material wealth and social mobility.

In line with the general evolution of American advertising, advertisements of French women in American magazines saw increasing minimization of copy in the 1960s, which forced readers to use their imagination to make associations based on what they might expect of French women. Perfumes were increasingly sold in sexually provocative ways, making insinuations that French femininity was promiscuous and powerful like the call of the Sirens in luring men to danger. One such advertisement from *Mademoiselle*'s October 1961 issue for Max Factor's "Primitif" presents a French-sounding and spelled perfume "for the woman who is every inch a female." In this image, a woman in the dark stares down readers as light from openings in blinds reveals her arched eyebrows and perched lips. The woman appears to be just like the name of the perfume she is wearing—primitive and ready to pounce with a seemingly sex-driven body that is "every inch a female." Although there are no explicit identifiers indicating Paris or France (in fact, the product comes from American manufacturer Max Factor), the use of the French word *primitif* insinuates an exotic quality that comes from

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<sup>11</sup>Note that my text builds off of the copy appearing in the ad: "See how lightly it smooths on, how lightly it blends into your skin, how lightly it banishes flaws, vanishes shadows and lines."

being a French woman. As Barthes and Williams note, there is a disconnection between reality and image. In this case, the Max Factor ads work to manufacture real desire to purchase a product through fantasy about the sexual availability and practices of French women and how that could help enhance the desirability of American women.

Other fragrances connoted wild, seductive, and sexually promiscuous French women. One such ad by Lenthéric in *Mademoiselle*'s March 1961 issue presents women running toward readers through a French field wearing flesh-colored tights. On the one hand, one might assume that the women's growing wild is related more to the spring months the copy is drawing attention to: "This is the one time of year you find it – the fragrance Spring wears to be Spring. Young, lighthearted Red Lilac, only grown by Lenthéric." However, the use of body suits that were the same color as the product insinuates the fragrance could make women spring-like, young, and lighthearted just as a sexually free, nearly nude, and liberated woman should supposedly be. Here, Lenthéric is selling a French-inspired femininity that facilitates uninhibited wildness, which plays off of broader American stereotypes of a sexual, promiscuous French woman.

Other advertisements from the 1960s were more daring in playing with sexual innuendoes<sup>12</sup>. Tabu and Ambush perfumes by French perfumer Dana utilized the tricolor to associate French femininity with the product's implied ability to help its wearers accept taboos and create an ensnaring attraction for men. "The charm of the forbidden..." reads Tabu's large-font copy, which is associated with a powdered, nude upper chest of a woman centered between the blue and red portions of the French flag transposed over her. The use of the words *charm* paired with *forbidden* insinuates that the perfume can make women attractive and facilitate a certain ease with taboos – sexual or otherwise – that might not be possible without it. For Ambush, the name of the perfume itself implicates French women to be hunters of men, as the copy explains: "take him completely by surprise." Just as Tabu lures toward the forbidden, Ambush enables women to ensnare men like the coy woman featured in the accompanying image, who hides behind white plumes and the blue and red stripes of the French tricolor. The French flag signifies France and Frenchness, and the use of women within the flag connotes French women. The name of the products, the copy describing them, and the associated images combine to reveal how French women are charming and agreeable to approaching and possibly breaking certain unspoken taboos. Such advertisements reinforce women's availability to male suitors and play into heteronormative notions of seduction.

French women not only can ensnare men like hunters, but they do so with the guile of cunning cats. Advertisements for Fabergé's Tigress perfume, which first appeared in *Mademoiselle* in October 1964 and as late as April 1967, associate French women with unbridled wildness and uninhibited seduction. In the earlier advertisement, a woman, who wears a sheer dress with Bengal-print shadows cast over her, crouches like a cat with an open mouth and hair wildly spread about. If readers did not catch the sexual availability of this "woman in heat," the copy makes it even more explicit: "Wild! Is the word for uninhibited jungle heat of Tigress." The French origin of the perfume is implied through the use of French words for "extraordinary perfume" ("parfum extraordinaire"), but the copy explicitly reiterates that the perfume was "made in France by Fabergé." Nothing in this advertisement

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<sup>12</sup> I do not wish to insinuate that earlier advertisements did not play on sexual fantasy. However, American advertisements in the 1960s were increasingly more daring and explicit about sexual matters than earlier times.

provides specific details about the utility of the product. Rather, it relies on the association readers should make between the tiny perfume bottle shown in the bottom, right corner of the page and the tiger-like Frenchwoman filling up the majority of the page. The modified version of the October 1964 ad appearing in the April 1967 issue of *Mademoiselle* used nearly the same copy, but instead of showing the woman's crouching body, the only image is of the woman's face and open mouth, which lines up perfectly with the large phallic-like bottle to insinuate the oral availability of the "Tigress on the loose!" The mention of France is not explicit as the October 1964 advertisement, but the use of French words *cologne extraordinaire*, *Fabergé*, and *Tigress* connote the Frenchness of this product.

The unexpected and wild nature of French women is represented in the advertisement for Coty perfume L'Imprévu. The discerning reader who knows French would know that *imprévu* in French means unexpected, but the use of the French word implies it is a French product. In one daring ad from *McCall's* December 1965 issue, an ecstatically laughing nude woman clutching her chest presents that "Imprévu is here!" Playing on the American idea of Paris being associated with spring as well as springtime being nature's moment of reproduction, the ad tells readers that "spring is an all-year thing" with the help of Coty, which can bring the unexpected to wearers of the perfume.

Another Coty ad running regularly in the United States and France in the mid-1960s was for Coty's L'Aimant perfume. As with the L'Imprévu perfume ad, this perfume plays on the use of the French word *l'aimant*, which means magnet, and just like a magnet's feature of being attracted to an opposite charge, L'Aimant helps pull women to men by working "like a kiss across the room." In the image that dominates the ad, a shorthaired brunette sits on the floor as she looks at a man sitting in a chair with a drink in hand. The woman is presented as available to the man, who seems to be awaiting the seemingly coy woman before him. The perfume "imported from France" identifies the product and the woman to be French. If women use this product, it will be easier for them to lure a man with a suggestive glance and an inviting fragrance.

Beyond being a force of attraction, French femininity was advertised to help create a mood to be adventurous and sexy. In *Mademoiselle's* October 1964 issue, *Ciro* presents its "Oh la la..." perfume as helping "for those black lace moods!" Here, a black garter belt surrounding a gift set for Oh la la perfume insinuates the product could be used at special, intimate "Oh la la" moments. Although the advertisement does not provide an image of a woman, the use of the common French expression "Oh là là" and a garter belt call forth associations with French lingerie or French "cancan" dancers who are well known among Americans for their flashy leg moves that reveal their garter belts.

Appealing to American women's appeal for wealth, wearing a French perfume could also make an American woman luxurious and wealthy. Possibly playing off of the 1953 hit film *How to Marry a Millionaire* featuring Marilyn Monroe, Lauren Bacall, and Betty Grable, Lanvin's March 1961 ad for Arpège insinuates that American women could marry a millionaire through the use of Arpège: "How to Marry a Millionaire...Arpège!" Lanvin, which described itself as "The best Paris has to offer," displays its bottle of perfume in front of a glowing sun, which beams down on what appears to be the Mediterranean coast, a symbol of luxurious relaxation. Similarly, Caron's *Fleurs de Rocaille* "classic" perfume is presented as a difficult gift for a woman to resist, especially if it comes from "a devilishly

handsome man who drives a Ferrari, owns a villa on the Côte d'Azur." According to a later ad for Fleurs de Rocaille in November 1966, such resistance should not be surprising, since the Coty brand is synonymous with French knowledge of what women want and should be to be alluring. Or, as the image of a balled up nude woman caressing a bottle of Fleurs de Rocaille reveals, "Caron is the kind of French every woman understands."

## Conclusion

French women were featured regularly in American magazine advertisements for perfumes and make-ups in the late 1950s and 1960s, and by closely examining a sampling of these ads' images and text, the admirable, sellable qualities of French women come into focus. French women, and French perfumes and make-ups by association, could make American women more attractive, luxurious, seductive, and empowered sexually and as feminine beings. On the surface, French women were used as visual markers of the French nation with the regular use of the French tricolor and scenes from the capital city of Paris. However, more pervasively, French words and common American tropes of French women solidified and sold visions of French beauty products' magical abilities to transform its American women wearers into sophisticated, liberated, and available to the men they desire. Magazine advertisements for products worked to inspire readers to make purchases of those products, which supported the larger establishment of mass consumer society in America. Items like beauty products, which are not needed as necessities of life, cannot sell themselves since they are discretionary and unnecessary to survive. Therefore, target purchasers' desires, fantasies, and anxieties were played upon to induce a pressing need to buy a product. American magazine ads worked to inspire purchases of French beauty products by relying on fantasies of what it meant to be French and feminine, which implicitly worked to help American women maximize their femininity by making up for any supposed deficiencies some readers might have felt with being an American woman. Although further research is needed into the production and reception of these advertisements, the dominant function of these advertisement's representations of French women offers ways for American women to transform themselves into *la Française*, or, at the very least, imagine that such transformation was possible.

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