

Caucasian Female Body Hair and American Culture

Christine Hope

Horace Miner, in his satirical account of the meticulous and often painful customs Americans practice in caring for their bodies, failed to mention one of the most common masochistic rituals—the removal of hair from the legs and armpits of the female body.¹ Women have for countless years been concerned with the occurrence of hair on their bodies. They have removed the hair from their head, from the pubic areas, and from their faces and have used it for erotic purposes. But in public advertising, the most obvious areas of concern have been the legs and armpits. Female observers have been quick to comment on the misery that the customs of removing hair from these parts of the body have occasioned. Robin Morgan calls “being agonized at fourteen because you have finally shaved your legs, and your flesh is on fire” one of the “barbarous rituals” of being female in America.”² Emily Prager, a young adult recounting the preparations she goes through before a date, acknowledges that the barbarity of the ritual does not disappear with early adolescence, “I used to shave my legs just before the date. I wanted to be sure they were ultra-smooth for the evening ahead. It took years of frantic last-minute efforts to (1) wash out the blood spots on my panty hose while (2) trying not to reopen the shaving nicks while (3) somehow detaching the sticky nylon from the severed skin, before I realized that one hour before a date is no time for me to have a razor in my hand.”³

Like the ritual actions mentioned by Miner (among them daily removal of facial hair by men and weekly sessions under the hair dryer for women), the practice of removing female body hair by shaving and other means is widespread despite its apparent painfulness. Various industry reports estimate that between eighty and ninety percent of American women remove their body hair.⁴ Despite its pervasiveness, the practice of removing female body hair has not been a subject of scholarly research. While there is a body of anthropological literature which speculates upon the symbolic meaning of the removal of *male* facial and head hair,⁵ female body hair is seldom mentioned in such treatments. But those behaviors which are most taken-for-granted in a culture may well be the most important ones for revealing an understanding of that culture; therefore the history and possible meanings of the removal of female hair in the United States is significant.

One of the important media for revealing this

practice is the American print medium, particularly advertising, between 1914 and 1945. A few females, especially those involved in stage work, were probably using preparations intended for facial hair removal of their body hair prior to 1914.⁶ However, it is clear from examining catalogs and beauty books that *most* women in the United States did not remove hair from underarms or legs prior to World War I. Modern practices appear to have been fairly well established by 1945 and choosing this endpoint gives a good slice of the twentieth century including two wars, an economic depression, and two full cycles of skirt lengths (from long to short to long and back to short).

Two excellent and representative sources for advertisements for hair removal products in women's magazines are *Harper's Bazar* and *McCall's*, the former representative of upper class women and the latter of middle-class females. In all the ads in these magazines, the type of product advertised, the type of hair (according to location on the body) mentioned or strongly implied (i.e. by pictures), the type of pitch made and whether the pitch was primarily instructional or product-based was important.⁷ In this study, ads were classified as “instructional” when their main emphasis was on informing readers why they should remove hair. Ads which stressed the qualities of the particular product being advertised were considered as “product-based.” Such classification was helpful in determining the extent to which manufacturers of hair removal products seemed to be involved in introducing innovative behavior as opposed to simply convincing women to use a particular brand. Beauty books, health texts, beauty advice columns in magazines, the Sears-Roebuck catalogs were used to check the impressions gleaned from the ads and to provide information on what lower class and rural women were being exposed to in the realm of hair removal. Based on the advertisements and other sources of information, four periods of hair removal advertising and behavior can be distinguished: “The Ivory Complexion” (prior to 1915); “The Great Underarm Campaign” (1915-1919); “Coming to Terms with Leg Hair” (1920-1940); and “A Minor Assault on Leg Hair” (1941-1945).

I. The Ivory Complexion (prior to 1915)

The ads for hair removers (depilatories and unspecified “treatments”) appearing in *Harper's*

Bazar and *McCall's* in 1914 are similar to ads prevalent throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They refer only to hair on the face, neck and arms, are small in size and number and are strictly product-based in nature. Like advertisements in Sears catalog during the same period, they embody assumptions about visible hair which were apparently well-established in the United States: visible hair not growing on the head was "superfluous," a blemish to be done away with, an affliction of an unfortunate few. Beauty books of this period and going back at least half a century typically lament the fate of women afflicted with such hair and offer the author's own formula for hair removal. One book, published in 1874, interprets the presence of such hair as a character defect attributable to "high living among middle-class people";⁸ another tells of a girl who died of heartbreak after the appearance of a healthy growth of hair upon her face;⁹ a third treats the problem of superfluous hair in the same chapter with liver spots, acne, wrinkles and sallow complexion.¹⁰

Although the undesirability of dark hair on women seems to be an established belief at this time, very little of the body was actually visible to the world given the fashions of the period, and therefore the removal of facial and body hair was probably of little direct concern to most American women during this period.

II. The Great Underarm Campaign (1915-1919)

Beginning in May, 1915, the advertisers in *Harper's Bazar* initiated an assault on underarm hair which was to last for approximately four years. Seventy-two percent of the hair remover ads during this period specifically mention underarms and most deal with underarms exclusively. The May, 1915, ad did not mention underarm hair by name but was otherwise characteristic of ads in the years to follow. It featured a waist-up photograph of a young woman who appears to be dressed in a slip with a toga-like outfit covering one shoulder. Her arms are arched over her head revealing perfectly clear armpits. The first part of the ad read "Summer Dress and Modern Dancing combine to make necessary the removal of objectionable hair." Within three months, the term "underarm" was being used. The ads continued to feature young ladies revealing their underarms while dressed in either undergarments or sleeveless evening dresses. In contrast to the earlier period, the ads between 1915 and 1919 were largely instructional in nature (62% of the 124 ads appearing in *Harper's Bazar* during these years were instructional). Like the first ad, most were concerned with informing

their readers that new styles of dress featuring sleeveless or very sheer-sleeved evening gowns made the removal of hair from the underarm an important consideration. Such phrases as the following are typical in these ads: "The Woman of Fashion Says the underarm must be as smooth as the face"; "Hair Removing Essential with Up-To-Date Gowns"; and "The full charm of the Decollete costume is attained when the underarm is perfectly smooth." There were a few ads which stressed the hygienic aspects of the practice (i.e., removing hair makes you clean and comfortable) and a few which played directly on psychological factors (e.g. removing hair allows you to feel less self-conscious and avoid embarrassment) but the fashion-based appeals were much more common.

Beginning in 1918, "limbs" were mentioned in the ads and by 1919 both "arms" and "limbs" are noted, indicating that legs were definitely being suggested as another location where hair removal was necessary. However, the legs are never specifically focused on during these years; underarms are the featured body part in these ads.

Another outstanding feature of hair remover advertising in this upper class women's magazine from 1915 to 1919 was its sheer volume. The number of ads for hair removal products increased steadily between 1914 and 1919. In 1914, there were six hair remover ads in *Harper's Bazar*; by 1919 there were thirty. Advertising for other personal hygiene products also increased during these years but not to the same extent. In short, the readers of *Harper's Bazar* were being given new information about the "proper" care of a previously ignored part of the body.

Were non-upper class women touched at all by this great assault on underarm hair? An analysis of the *McCall's* ads reveals that here too there was a campaign going on. The mention of underarm hair in *McCall's* advertising does not occur until January, 1917. Throughout 1917 and 1918 the hair remover advertising in *McCall's* is much like that in *Harper's Bazar*: 58% of the ads focus on the underarms, 63% are instructional in nature, and 79% of these instructional ads use a fashion-based appeal. In 1919, the number of ads increases but most are product-based rather than instructional and limbs as well as underarms are mentioned. The increase in other types of advertising noted in *Harper's Bazar* also occurs in *McCall's* but is less dramatic and consistent. In short, there was an underarm campaign in *McCall's* but it began later, tapered off earlier, and was less overwhelming in terms of numbers of ads than was the campaign in *Harper's Bazar*. The lag time is not surprising given that the

advertising followed dress fashions fairly closely and that such fashions started in the upper class and gradually moved down the class structure.

Sears first offers dresses with sheer sleeves in 1922 (sleeveless dresses do not appear on catalog pages until 1925). That same year marks the first time that products designated to remove hair other than that on face, neck and arms are offered to the general public. The fall 1922 catalog features both a woman's decollete safety razor (identical to a standard safety razor except for its somewhat smaller size and fancier case) and a depilatory ad mentioning underarm hair, complete with picture of a young woman admiring her hairfree underarms in a mirror.

One of the first beauty books which mentioned the removal of underarm hair was published in 1922; the topic of underarm hair removal is not mentioned in health texts until 1925; several women's magazines also have articles on the subject during the middle 1920s. I found only one magazine article mentioning the removal of underarm hair during the time of greatest underarm advertising. In other words, it seems to have been the advertisers of hair removal products who first "educated" American women about the importance of removing underarm hair. Thus women may have been predisposed to accept such a suggestion. However, it is perhaps only too obvious that by publicly defining underarm hair as "superfluous," "unwanted," "ugly" and "unfashionable," the depilatory advertisers were greatly expanding their potential market: few women have continuous growths of dark hair on their face and neck during adulthood, almost all have underarm hair growth.

III. Coming to Terms with Leg Hair (1920-1940)

Ads during the period 1920-1940 declined in number, concentrated on product qualities rather than upon introducing new behavior, and focused on hair removal in general rather than on any particular body part. Both magazines reached a peak in hair remover advertising in 1921 and both showed a level of advertising in the 1930s lower than that of the late teens and early twenties. The fact that this type of advertising became concentrated in the months from April to September rather than appearing in every month of the year (as was previously the case) probably accounts for the yearly declines of the 1930s. Three-fourths of the ads during this period focused on the particular product being advertised rather than on the necessity of removing hair. Common themes in this advertising included the established reputation of a product, endorsement

by celebrities (usually actresses), and comparison to other hair removal methods and products.

Although most hair remover ads of this period were product-based, some continued the instructional mission of the earlier period and extended the concern with underarms to other parts of the body. Most of the ads of the 1920-40 period refer to the lower limbs specifically and, beginning in 1923, they are almost always called "legs." Like earlier similar ads, the instructional ads of this period stress the fashion aspect noting that hair-free legs are necessary both when one is wearing sheer stockings ("———destroys the hairs that show thru the silken sheen") and when going bare-legged on the beach or at the swimming pool ("———enables a woman to bathe stockingless, without self-consciousness"). However, legs were seldom the major focus of hair remover advertising during this period. In *Harper's Bazar*, 66% of the hair remover ads of this period referred to leg hair but only 10% mentioning leg hair focused on it. An additional 21% focused on leg hair plus the hair of some other part of the body (usually the arm). The comparable figures for *McCall's* were 59%, 9% and 22%. At no time is there a campaign against leg hair comparable to the earlier campaign against underarm hair. Hence the more typical instructional ad of the period pictured a woman in rather scanty attire, perhaps with arms above her head, and placed equal emphasis on the importance of smooth arms (including underarms) and smooth legs.

Although the types of hair remover ads which appear during this period are fairly similar in the two magazines surveyed, there are some interesting class differences. Hair remover advertising completely disappears from *McCall's* from 1924 to 1926. This is particularly surprising in light of the fact that skirt lengths were going up during these three years and reached their shortest length in 1926. Interestingly, depilatory advertising in Sears also disappears at about the same time. After offering a depilatory designed to remove hair from the "Forearms, armpits, and limbs" in 1924, no depilatories appear again in the catalog until 1929, and the lower limbs are not mentioned again until 1931 (at which time they are called "legs"). The only hair removal implement for women the catalog lists at all from 1925 to 1929 is a curved safety razor, especially designed to fit the armpit.

In other words, at a time which would seem to offer advertisers prime opportunities to sell their products using a fashion-based appeal, they failed to advertise—at least in two publications reaching millions of middle-class and lower middle-class homes in urban and rural America. At a time when

skirt lengths were rising, the sales of silk stockings were booming, and abbreviated bathings suits were becoming popular, advertisers refused to focus directly upon the legs. The available evidence indicates that the advertising of the time may have been a reflection of ambivalence of American women concerning the issues of legs and leg hair.

Cultural conceptions of female beauty were in the process of changing during the period 1920-1940. The ideal female beauty at the beginning of the twentieth century had been an ivory-shouldered, fair complexioned matron with a luxuriant head of hair whose legs might as well have been missing (as indeed they were from beauty and hygiene books of the time). By the middle of the century, attention had been drawn to lower parts of the anatomy and a tanned, shapely, hairless leg was a thing of beauty. The years 1920-1940 were transitional years. While the underarm might have been seen as an extension of the ivory white face, neck and shoulders (and, indeed, was often pictured as such in the ads), the legs might have represented a strange and foreign territory. It is quite possible that some women were simply too modest to pay as much attention to their legs as hair removal would have required. In a culture which did not yet emphasize legs as a major component of beauty, they could afford to do so.

There are a few indications that, at least for some women, any hair removal at all was considered immoral not so much because it dealt with hidden body parts but rather because the first women to engage in the practice were regarded as "bad women." Virginia Kirkus mildly scolds those who make this objection in her 1922 beauty book when she writes, "Some people who consider themselves very particular look down upon the girl who shaves her legs and underarm hair, but as a matter of fact they have no more right to scorn her than scorn the man who shaves the hair from his face.... Because the practice of underarm depilatory or shaving started with chorus girls is no reason for considering it beneath the dignity of the social leader. Lucky the woman who has no superfluous hair; let the rest of her sex get rid of it as best they can."¹¹ Thus, for some women, the refusal to remove body hair might have represented a personal stand against the many changes and "immorality" of the era.

There might also have been some ambivalence about the methods used to remove body hair, particularly on an area as large as the leg. Depilatories were messy, smelly and sometimes (according to the health texts and consumer reports) dangerous, leaving skin rashes and abscesses where the hair had been and would soon be again.¹² The use of wax was painful and one ran the risk of burns. A slip in shaving could leave a blemish more severe

(and much more painful) than the hair removed. Advertisers of other products and the authors of some beauty books were sensitive to these fears. A "flesh-colored" dress shield introduced in 1917 might well have been designed to cover up underarm hair. Stockings could be used to cover up leg hair beneath revealing dresses or bathing suits. A 1927 beauty book specifies in exacting detail how this might be done. "Heavy stockings seem to provide the solution to this problem. A heavy steel-gray silk will look like a black chiffon at a distance, and so satisfy fashion's demand for sheer hosiery. Flesh tints in thick silk or in lisle are also suitable. The mottled silk and wool mixture for sports wear effectively conceals the unsightly hairs."¹³ Sears offered a similar solution in advertising "flesh" underhose to be worn under silk stockings in 1927, 1928 and 1929.

Thus it appears that there was quite a bit of uncertainty connected with the removal of leg hair during the 1920s. No one seemed to be arguing that such hair was "beautiful" or "natural" and should be left alone, however. Although the evidence presented suggests that many women did not adopt the practice of removing hair from the legs when it was first introduced, there is some evidence that a substantial number of women (particularly, perhaps, those who reached adulthood during the 1920s) were removing hair from both underarms and legs by 1930. Helena Rubenstein, in a beauty book published in 1930, wrote that removal of hair from the underarms and legs was "as much a part of the routine of every woman as washing her hair or manicuring her nails."¹⁴ An article in *Hygeia* in the same year stated that removal of arm, leg and underarm hair is "a social convention" and that "Many women use the razor for removing the hair from under the arm. Others shave hair from the legs or the forearms."¹⁵ If hair removal were only a fashionable fad engaged in by a few people, one would expect it to disappear in an era when fashions no longer revealed as much hair. Such does not seem to be the case. Judging from the Depression-era offerings of Sears and the comments in health texts and beauty books published during the 1930s, at least some of those who began the practice during the 1920s to keep up with fashion had turned it into custom by the 1930s.

IV. A Minor Assault on Leg Hair (1941-1945)

The war years, 1941-1945, introduced several changes which doubtlessly had an effect on hair removal practices. Skirts were becoming shorter. The war made it so difficult to obtain silk stockings that the style became "bareleggedness," often accompanied by the application of a leg make-up

designed to mimic hosiery. Safety razors were difficult to obtain during some periods of the war.

These factors or others seem to have affected hair remover advertising. Although the ads were no more numerous than in the 1930s, more of them focused on the leg directly and more were instructional. This was particularly the case in *Harper's Bazar* where 87.5% of the ads of the period were instructional, all mentioned leg hair, and 56% (compared with 10% in the previous period) focused on the leg directly. Advertising in *McCall's*, on the other hand, retained many of the conservative features of the previous decade or earlier. Sixty percent of the *McCall's* ads during this period did not mention leg hair at all and only 35% were instructional. However, of those ads which did mention leg hair, 88% put major emphasis on it, a change from the preceding period. The tone of the instructional advertising changed somewhat: women were no longer being told to remove hair in order to complement the newest fashions—the leg itself had become the fashion. The legs were emphasized in the photographs or drawings accompanying the ads and the headlines featured such phrases as “Man's eye view,” and “Let's Look at Your Legs—Everyone Else Does.”

This “minor assault on leg hair” was not nearly as intense as the earlier underarm campaign had been. However, unlike the earlier campaign, this one received substantial reinforcement from beauty editors of magazines and authors of beauty books. For example, the beauty editor of *Harper's Bazar* wrote repeatedly about legs throughout the late 1930s and early 1940s. In 1939 she wrote, “A word in passing about legs. Ankle socks on the campus are a fine, old institution and all very well, but not on furry legs. If you must wear socks you owe it to your associates to get into the habit of using some safe, dependable depilatory. And we mean regularly—not just once in a blue moon as a kind of isolated experiment.”¹⁶ The subject came up again two years later, “As to neatness, we wouldn't think of insisting that you give up bare legs, but if we were dean of women, we'd levy a demerit on every hairy leg on campus.”¹⁷

Older women did not escape the scoldings. A beauty book admonition put it this way, “Surely we are all awake to the necessity of keeping the underarm free of any hair growth, not only for the improvement in appearance, but because such growths harbor the odor from even mild perspiration. But I find that there are many who still do not consider it important to keep the legs free of hair. Such women should be forced to wear heavy hose. If they are modern enough to demand silk stockings,

then they should certainly prepare their legs so that no thick 'forest' of hair is visible through the sheer fabric.”¹⁸

These writers and others confirm two of the observations made about the previous periods: that many women were not removing leg hair at all (or were doing so only on rare occasions) and that stockings were frequently used to conceal hairy legs. The authors of these articles seemed to be occupied with training a new generation in the practice of hair removal and with making it a regular, rather than an occasional, beauty practice. Whether or not the advice given in the 1940s was heeded immediately is not clear. However, the fact that 98% of all American women aged 15-44 in 1964 removed body hair (70% of those older than 44 did so)¹⁹ would seem to indicate that most of those who reached their twenties during the 1940s adopted the practice.

Edward Sapir, one of the foremost theorists on the subject of fashion, has written, “An important principle in the history of fashion is that those features of fashion which do not configurate with the unconscious system of meaning characteristic of the given culture are relatively insecure.”²⁰ The “fashion” of female hair removal seems, by now, to be fairly secure, and it can be shown that this seemingly trivial practice seems to correspond to several larger cultural configurations in American culture.

Numerous observers have noted an American preoccupation with cleanliness.²¹ This concern manifests itself particularly strongly in American feelings about the human body and its products, whether they be blood, feces, sweat or odors. The general attitude of Americans seems to be one of disgust and of a strong desire to rid themselves of any reminder that such things exist. As Miner expressed it in an article satirizing American personal hygiene behavior, “The fundamental belief underlying the whole system appears to be that the human body is ugly and that its natural tendency is to debility and disease. Incarcerated in such a body, man's only hope is to avert these characteristics through the use of the powerful influences of ritual and ceremony.”²² Female body hair has been treated in much the same way as other body products: it is said to be “ugly” and “disfiguring,” and even “morbid”; it is to be removed in the privacy of one's own bathroom or bedroom (where most of the other ritual cleansing acts take place); and one's closest acquaintances are never supposed to know about either the hair or its removal (one of the advantages of odorless depilatories, according to the ads during the 1930s was that their use left no “telltale odor”).

Advertising for hair removal products became

more prevalent and more explicit during the same period other cleanliness behaviors were being introduced or reinforced through advertising. Women during this period were not only being told that their body hair was unfashionable, but also that their breath was bad, that they were probably turning away suitors because of body odor, that "feminine daintiness" demanded a certain type of sanitary napkin, and that being a good mother meant using soft toilet tissue. In short, one's goodness and value as a human being came to be identified with one's attention to rather stringent personal hygiene routines.

The cleanliness explanation is incomplete, however, since the ritual of body hair removal is applied to only one sex. Other cultures which have emphasized cleanliness and have identified body hair as unclean have required its removal by *both* sexes. This was the case with the ancient Egyptians who bathed several times a day and removed hair from both head and body as a preventive measure against infection.²³ Body hair removal on the part of females in the United States can undoubtedly be seen as part of the American concern with cleanliness but there is apparently more to it than this. In particular, the American custom of hair removal may well reflect American beliefs about sex roles and about the appropriate relationship between the two sexes.

American culture has generally defined male and female as polar opposites.²⁴ The tendency shows up in ways of thinking and speaking and in formal social psychological experiments.²⁵ Traits defined as "masculine" (e.g., independence, aggressiveness, objectivity, etc.) are automatically defined as "unfeminine" and vice-versa. This way of thinking might be seen as a special case of the American tendency to view the world generally in terms of absolutes.²⁶ As Slater notes, it is certainly an effective method of social control—women are hesitant about engaging in "masculine" activities (at which they may be better than many men) for fear of being labelled "unfeminine."²⁷

There is a second aspect of American sex role beliefs which deserves recognition: the tendency to think of adults as male and to lump women with nonadults. This tendency is reflected in the American legal tradition, for example. It was demonstrated most convincingly in a recent experiment conducted by Broverman *et al.* A sample of clinicians was divided into three groups: one group was asked to specify the traits of a "mature, healthy socially competent adult man," another to do the same for a "mature, healthy socially competent adult woman," and the third to describe a "mature, healthy socially competent adult" (sex unspecified). When

the results were in, the list of adult male traits and adult traits were very similar (e.g., both lists included such traits as "very dominant," "very independent," "very objective," "not at all easily influenced," etc.) and both were different from the list of adult female traits (which included "very submissive," "not at all independent," "very subjective," "very easily influenced," etc.). The authors concluded: "Acceptance of an adjustment notion of health, then, places women in the conflictual position of having to decide whether to exhibit those positive characteristics considered desirable for men and adults, and thus have their 'femininity' questioned, that is, be deviant in terms of being a woman; or to behave in the prescribed feminine manner, accept a second-class adult status, and possibly live a lie to boot."²⁸

These two tendencies, to see male and female as opposites and to consider women as less than full adults, are reflected in and reinforced by the custom of female hair removal and the advertising which accompanied its introduction. It may be significant that the movement to encourage the removal of body hair by women coincided with the decline of other customs which had formerly separated American women from American men: the lack of suffrage, the constricting, distinct styles of clothing emphasizing the bust and waist, and very discreet public behavior. In fact, the 1920s are frequently viewed as a period of "desexualization."²⁹ The emphasis on the necessity of removing female body hair during the 1920s might be seen as a reaction to the desexualization tendencies of the age—as an attempt to reassert the distinction between male and female. The literature on hair removal regularly expounds the belief that hairiness signifies masculinity and the lack of hair signifies femininity. One such source, a book on cosmetics published by the cosmetics industry, put it like this: "One of the things that distinguish woman from man is the lack of hair on her face, forearm, and legs.... Whatever the reason, it is an assured fact that both men and women are proud of the difference. The body hair of the male denotes strength and manliness. The smooth, fair skin of the female denotes gentility and womanly charm."³⁰ Some of the hair remover advertising also focused in on this theme by asking "Can any woman afford to look masculine?" and by declaiming shaving as the "harsh, masculine" method of hair removal as opposed to the more "feminine" depilatory method. The persistence of female hair removal behavior in an age when differences between the sexes have been obliterated even further (at least on the surface and probably in the public mind) is perhaps a manifestation of our continuing cultural habit

(need?) of seeing the world in terms of opposites: there must be *some* difference between men and women.

The practice of female body hair removal might also be seen as a way in which the culture encourages women to deny their full adulthood. After all, the lack of dark hair on places other than the scalp is naturally characteristic of *children*, not adult women. The growth of dark, coarse body hair on the legs, thighs, chest, and arms (as well as in the underarm and pubic regions) is a normal accompaniment of puberty for many Caucasian women, just as it is for most Caucasian men. Thus, "feminine," when applied to the absence of body hair, doesn't really mean "womanly," it means "childlike" and "masculine" means "adult-like." The hair removal ads of the past and of today blatantly confirm this: "baby" is part of the brand name of several products (e.g. "Baby Touch" abrasive and "Nair with Baby Oil") and the terms "baby soft," "velvety" and "tender" often appear in the ads. Thus, not only are Caucasian American women supposed to manifest nonadult personality characteristics, they are also expected to get rid of certain bodily signs of adulthood.

This brief attempt to place American customs concerning female body hair removal into the larger cultural system has been incomplete and speculative. A complete appraisal would require information concerning the custom (or lack of such custom) in a variety of cultures, including among the various ethnic and racial women in American culture. Meanwhile, however, I have provided a short historical description of the development of the custom among Caucasian women in the United States based on magazine advertising and have pointed out a few cultural connections which should serve as at least a partial basis for further study.

Notes

- ¹Horace Miner, "Body Ritual Among the Nacirema," *American Anthropologist*, 58 (1956), 503-507.
- ²Robin Morgan, *Going Too Far: The Personal Chronicle of a Feminist* (New York: Random House, 1977), pp. 107-108.
- ³Emily Prager, "First-Date Jitters," *Viva*, June 1977, p. 36.
- ⁴"Advice for Women Who Shave," *Today's Health*, July 1964, p. 36 and "Depilatories," *Consumer Reports*, Jan. 1975, p. 60.
- ⁵E.R. Leach, "Magical Hair," *Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland Journal*, 88 (1958), 147-164; C.R.

Hallpike, "Social Hair," *Man* 8 (n.s.), (1973), 100-103.

⁶See ads for depilatories in the "theatrical goods" section of the 1902 Sears catalog (p. 939) and Virginia Kirkus, *Everywoman's Guide to Health and Personal Beauty* (New York: Martin & Murray, 1922), p. 195.

⁷The January-June, 1916; November, 1919; and January-June, 1924, issues of *Harper's Bazar* and the January, 1920, issue of *McCall's* could not be located.

⁸Susan C. Power, *The Ugly-Girl Papers; or Hints for the Toilet* (New York: Harper, 1874), pp. 125-126.

⁹Harriet Hubbard Ayer, *Harriet Hubbard Ayer's Book: A Complete and Authentic Treatise on the Laws of Health and Beauty* (1902; rpt. Arno Press, 1974), pp. 107-112.

¹⁰Anna M. Galbraith, M.D., *Personal Hygiene and Physical Training for Women* (Philadelphia and London: W.B. Saunders Co., 1916), Chapter II.

¹¹Kirkus, p. 185.

¹²Arthur Kallet and F.J. Schlink, *100,000,000 Guinea Pigs: Dangers in Everyday Foods, Drugs, and Cosmetics* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1933), pp. 80-92; M.C. Phillips, *Skin-Deep: The Truth about Beauty Aids—Safe and Harmful* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1934), pp. 96-103; Jesse Feiring Williams, A.B., M.D., *Personal Hygiene Applied* (Philadelphia and London: W.B. Saunders, 2nd ed., rev., 1925), pp. 295-297.

¹³Lois Leeds and Hilda M. Kaji, *Beauty and Health: A Practical Handbook* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1927), p. 226.

¹⁴Helena Rubinstein, *The Art of Feminine Beauty* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1930), pp. 116-117.

¹⁵Herman Goodman, "The Problem of Excess Hair," *Hygeia*, May 1930, pp. 432-434.

¹⁶Elinor Guthrie Neff, "The Cosmetic Urge," *Harper's Bazar*, August 1939, p. 114.

¹⁷Elinor Guthrie Neff, "The Cosmetic Urge," *Harper's Bazar*, August 1941, p. 111.

¹⁸Veronica Dengel, *Personality Unlimited: The Blue Beauty Book* (Philadelphia: John C. Winston, 1943).

¹⁹"Advice for Women Who Shave," p. 36.

²⁰Edward Sapir, "Fashion," in *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*. Vol. 6, ed. R.A. Seligman and Alvin Johnson (New York: Macmillan, 1930), p. 141.

²¹Lucy R. Garretson, *American Culture: An Anthropological Perspective* (Dubuque: Brown, 1976), p. 21; Robin M. Williams, Jr., *American Society: A Sociological Interpretation* (New York: Knopf, 1951), pp. 380-381 and Miner, 503-507.

²²Miner, p. 503.

²³Fenja Gunn, *The Artificial Face: A History of Cosmetics* (New York: Hippocrene Books, Inc., 1973), pp. 31, 44-45.

²⁴Laurel Richardson Walum, *The Dynamics of Sex and Gender: A Sociological Perspective* (Chicago: Rand McNally College Publishing, 1977), p. 5.

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²⁶Williams, pp. 396-397.

²⁷Philip Slater, *The Pursuit of Loneliness: American Culture at the Breaking Point* (Boston: Beacon), p. 21.

²⁸Broverman, et al., p. 6.

²⁹James R. McGovern, "The American Woman's Pre-World I Freedom in Manners and Morals," *The Journal of American History* 55 (Sept. 1968), 322.

³⁰Everett G. McDonough, *Truth About Cosmetics* (New York: The Drug and Cosmetic Industry, 1937), p. 187.

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