

**Book Review:**

**Kathy Piess. *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture*. University of Pennsylvania Press (September 16, 2011)
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As most of the research in media representation and beauty ideal suggest that the current beauty ideal and cosmetic industry became a source of oppression for women, *Hope in a jar* is definitely a good read to complicate this perception and alter people's views. Written by Kathy Peiss, a professor in American History currently at the University of Pennsylvania, *hope in a jar* is a fascinating book that appeals to both academics and the public. Having been working on similar topics for years, Peiss is particularly interested in how culture shapes individuals' beliefs and daily lives in America. Her work includes studying of women and interracial sexuality, the beauty industry in the U.S. and abroad through a history point of view.

The book focused on the development of beauty industry in America from 19th to late 20th century and showed us, women were far from being the victims of beauty ideals and male gaze; they used makeup to express themselves, declared their individuality and sexuality in the early stage of development. The message that makeup, especially mascara and rouge, carries changed according to the development of the society as women stepped into the public sphere. In the beginning it was a sign of indecency but later it became a tool for women to express their individuality. Several female entrepreneurs such as Elizabeth Arden, Madam C.J. Walker, Annie Turnbo Malone were included

to demonstrate the unique way women make their way through entrepreneurship in their community. The beauty trade dominated by female kind thrived until bigger corporations (advertisement, media etc.) run by men stepped into the growing mass market and shaped it into what it looks like today.

The book chapters are organized chronically and each chapter focuses on a different sector of the beauty industry. The book starts with an introduction of the background of people's cosmetic use in the western societies from the 16th century to the mid-19th century. Initially Cosmetics were a mostly homemade cottage industry. With the development of technology, industrialization, globalization and modernization, the perception of cosmetics and the perception of femininity changed. Chapter two illustrated this change during mid-19th to early 20th century. Chapter three to six gave us a very thorough history of the development of beauty culture between late 18th to 1930s through different sectors of the industry, from female entrepreneurs, consumers, to marketing and advertising industry. Peiss highlights the uniqueness of how women did business through community and demonstrated female agencies, whether as a consumer or as a business woman in these chapters. Chapter seven is dedicated to the beauty industry in African American communities. Although in each chapter there was a part comparing White and African American cosmetic industries yet this chapter focuses on the politics of beauty ideal in African American cosmetic industries. The final chapter served as a conclusion and talked about the industry from the 1940s and

beyond when radical changes such as feminist movements occurred.

Overall Peiss did a very good job of providing the thick description of the development of American cosmetic industry before 1940s. To counter the perception that women are exploited through the development of cosmetic industry, Peiss provided evidence from various sources, including market research reports and stories of the female entrepreneurs, to demonstrate women's agencies and experiences from different social class, ethnicity, race, and age. She provided both perspectives from female consumers and entrepreneurs. Through this, she argued that the closed community women live in, such as immediate family and girlfriends that they pay visits every week, played a much larger role in consumer socialization than advertisement. Women were aware of their choices and sometimes critical to their choices. Another aspect of cosmetic industry that Peiss emphasized is the gender dynamic. In the beginning, makeup is understood by many men as women's deception. Many men reported that they don't like make up due to its texture and smell. However, women did not put makeup on to pleasure men. They use makeup to pleasure themselves. According to Peiss, makeup had become an 'aesthetic expression' that is deeply integrated into women's everyday lives. "They took sensory delight in makeup, enjoyed the sociability it engendered, and lucidly perceived what appearances the labour market and social life demanded of them". Makeup is "a common language of self-expression and self-understanding" for women. The book concluded that the

public debate over whether the use of cosmetics serve as oppression or emancipation continues while women will continue the application of makeup as an expression of naturalness and artifice. The meaning of makeup and beauty culture will constantly evolve and will never stay still.

Hope is a good book to understand the complexity and fluidity of beauty culture across different times. Even though it is focused on American beauty culture and industry, it's easy to relate it to the rest of the world. The book would be bettered if Peiss were able to demonstrate female entrepreneurs' agencies. The stories of how female entrepreneurs set up their business despite many challenges showed women's agencies and power on the one hand, but they also reflected how little choice women had to participate in the public sphere at that time. If there were more interviews, diaries and text available from these women directly, we might see the other side of the stories. Whatever they are, I applaud these women since they build an empire from scratch.