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The Cosmetics Industry and Changing Standards of Womanhood
New Book Examines the Transformation of Feminine Ideals in Third Republic France

Baton Rouge—Holly Grout’s book *The Force of Beauty*, to be published by LSU Press in June 2015, will examine the effects of the meteoric growth of the cosmetics industry in France’s third republic and its effects on conventional standards of womanhood. Grout moves beyond the narrative of beauty culture as a tool for sociopolitical subjugation to show how it also targeted women as important consumers in major markets and created new avenues by which they could express their identities and challenge or reinforce gender norms.

As cultural media—from magazines to novels to cinema—and cosmetics companies urged women to aspire to commercial standards of female perfection, beauty evolved as a goal to pursue rather than mere biological inheritance. The products and techniques that enabled women to embody society’s feminine ideal also taught them how to fashion their bodies into objects of desire and thus offered a subversive tool of self-expression. By recognizing this new sense of empowerment, Grout also explores the French commercial beauty industry’s efforts to reconcile traditional standards of respectability with new ideas about female sexuality.

Grout draws on a wide range of primary sources—hygiene manuals, professional and legal debates about the right to fabricate and distribute “medicines,” advertisements for beauty products, and contemporary fiction and works of art—to explore how French women navigated changing views on femininity. Her seamless integration of gender studies with business history, aesthetics, and the history of medicine results in a textured and complex study of the relationship between the politics of womanhood and the politics of beauty.

Holly Grout is assistant professor of history at the University of Alabama.

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264 pages, 6 x 9, 8 halftones, 1 chart
978-0-8071-5988-0
Cloth \$45.00s, ebook available
Gender Studies / French History

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