

Behind the kiss

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That cherry red smear on your cheek. The mark of a kiss. It is more than just the seal of your high school crush's confession letter. It is more than just the embarrassing mark of your mother's goodbye each school morning. It is more than just that waxy snack you experimented with as a child. It is lipstick. A rouge pen, that hosts a meticulous history behind that simple stick of wax swathed in cases metal and plastic.

According to Merriam Webster, Lipstick is a '*waxy solid usually colored cosmetic in stick form for the lips.*' But the social significance of this little make up product transcends the aisles of Sephora. The history of the coloured cosmetic paints itself into history in cycles, present in myriads of cultures and countries.

Most historians credit the Primal Sumerians as the rightful *inventors* of lipstick (Idcavage 2016), the cosmetic began as a assortment of crushed red gem stones blended with a base of white lead (Nygaard 2017). These ingredients made the phrase 'a kiss of death' more than just a metaphor. This assortment of material was used to decorate not just the lips but the entire face including everything from the cheeks, the eyes at first. While the Sumerians date the cosmetics back to 3,500 B.C. Historians will forever quarrel on who the original founder of lipstick was, most agree that it was Queen Schub-ad of ancient Ur was the first and the world soon followed suit but not necessarily with the Queen as their inspiration. While the original founder of lipstick is insignificant what is more interesting, is the prevalence of this concept of coloring one's lips throughout the course of human history.

Around this period the cosmetic had not been claimed by women, rather it was an emblem of denoting social status instead of gender. Both men and women bore concoctions of orange, magenta, and blue-black, with red being reserved for only the Avante Garde. Over time as history progressed one would begin to note lipstick's shifting femininity. In the empires of Greece most eschewed from any form of facial cosmetics, a time of natural beauty that the modern world of Kylie Jenner lip kits and Instagram filters will never be able to replicate. Unlike the Egyptians, in Greece, the domain of this cosmetic here was of an entirely different pedigree. In Greece there was no chic blend of lavish materials painted onto the lips, it was simply red dye and wine, with the occasional appearance of sheep sweat, human saliva, and crocodile excrement (Schaffer 2006). Why? Because in Greece, lipstick, was the mark of a prostitute (Schaffer 2006).

In China amidst the Tang dynasty, the Chinese made lipstick from thousand-year-old beeswax with the intention of protecting the delicate skin on the lips, eventually even adding scented oils and slowly with this passage of time what was once the paint of an ancient queen slowly begins to mirror the tubes that line the shelves of today's make-up stores (Wikipedia n.d.).

With the crumbling of these empires the popularity of lipstick would not fade, in Western Europe only of scrapings of the writings of religious scholars recount the history of lipstick in society (Schaffer 2006), different shades of colour faded in and out of popularity throughout different nations across the continent. While most identify a decline of lipstick in the supposedly titled 'dark ages' (Cameron 1970) lip painting was still widespread throughout the world.

Prominence however does not guarantee positive connotations, in fact in England "a woman who wore make-up was seen as an incarnation of Satan," because such these modifications to the face challenged the sculpting of God and the human form (Kozlowski 2004). However even these assessments oscillated within those same communities, within England alone for example social prescriptions regarding the

shades of colour varied, lily and rose tints carried connotations of purity inviting women to apply peculiar ingredients like mashed red roots and sheep fat (Schaffer 2006). Over time lipstick was seen as both scandalous and fashionable, another stage of development in this cosmetic's history followed in the Renaissance period (Nygaard 2017). Lipstick slowly grew to become a more widespread conventional symbol of feminine beauty. A red lip aficionado the Queen of England herself embraced the makeup item; and like Queen Schub-ad, court ladies of England followed her stride.

A particularly noteworthy development that Queen Elizabeth's coronation bore was the invention of a 'lip pencil' (Schaffer 2006) reportedly developed by one of her servants first mixing plaster and a coloring component, then proceeding to roll this paste into a crayon-like form and allowing it to harden by drying it in the sun. This was likely the world's first *lipstick* and the earliest construal of lipstick in a form that mirrors that of today, not socially, but physically.

From there the popularity of this dressing table pop culture icon only amplified. Understanding and appreciating this abundance of history behind something as simple as a veneer for the lips is important to appreciating this lucrative cosmetic. But the contemporary form of lipstick is just as enthralling as its antiquity.

Lipstick in today's world is worn as a symbol of beauty. The rosy kiss stain of lipstick is one of the many pop culture crests in today's society. If the eyes are the opening to one's soul, the lips are the equivalent door for the body. They host the softness and promise of the nectar one craves. So, it comes as no surprise that even today millions rush to capitalize on this hyper-sexualised body part. The primary ingredients that surface millions of lips include wax, oil, alcohol, and pigment (madehow n.d.). Waxes of bees, candelilla and camauba find their way into these cosmetic tubes; Oils of mineral, castor, lanolin, and even just vegetable are then melded with the final addition of fragrance and pigmentation with the intentions of preventing the product from decomposing. With these materials manufacturers melt, mix, mould then package (madehow n.d.).

Now people all across the globe rush to stores each day every time one of the multitude of shades runs out. The industry develops, produces and packages every sort of lip product including stick, liner, balm and gloss (ibis world 2019). In 2018 the lipstick industry in the United States alone was worth \$4.3 billion in 2018 (ibis world 2019) with approximately 84 producers in America alone. One thing is for sure, the industry, considering it has survived for over 5000 years is definitely not one that is going away any time soon.

You tighten the Windsor knot and spray a puff of cologne as you rush down the stairs, speeding to the door your mom stands by entryway

"Sweetie you look so handsome"

She smiles. She smiles her sanguine shaded lipstick as she kisses your cheek goodbye. Getting in your 2011 black Camry you speed to her house. It's the second date. You're outside. She gets in the car. She smiles her scarlet shade and leans in. This cliché concept of what lipstick represents in today's society, while romantic, is only a portion of this diminutive cosmetic product's worth. It is more than just the

‘mark a woman leaves on her man’. While lipstick has become a renowned sex symbol and emblem of one’s love, lipstick has a rockier reputation than just a mere aesthetic on people’s lips.

Through a feminist critical lens, the wax product is much more than just a bold fashion statement. Crimson lips since their dawning have been symbols of social status, leadership and great power.

Whether it is simply in the fact that is worn by significant female leaders in history including the likes of Cleopatra and Queen Elizabeth, or by the fact that it was the grounding for female entrepreneurship with Elizabeth Arden in 1910 opening the Red Door Salon on Fifth Avenue in Manhattan, New York. Only a mere few decades ago was it entirely illegal for a woman to even own a property.

The infamous militant women's organization known as the Suffragettes took their fight for the right to vote to the streets of New York in 1912, with Arden immediately acting upon this by renaming the store ‘Red Door Red’ and distributing tubes to Suffragettes passing the salon.

The shade of red on their lips soon became a socially recognized symbol, referencing ‘hope, power, strength and camaraderie’ (THE FEMINIST HISTORY OF RED LIPSTICK 2017) .

With the gradual growth of this dominant red shade, even the stars of Hollywood began to command the public’s attention using their ruby lips as a lure. Women around the world grew inspired by this sense of self-assurance purchasing burgundies and currant. Those once overtly sexualised lips now became a source of social independence for woman all over the world.

Modern studies reference the ‘lipstick effect’, magnifying the psychology behind the importance of this beauty product. During periods of adversity, statistical analysis imply that lipstick sales tend to rise. Lipstick has become a symbol of strength, perhaps even one of rebellion allowing one to disdain from societal norms. With each tube, think not of the lingerie that would match that shade of red, rather acknowledge the strenuous hours women spent during the first world war, using those same tubes as foundations of self-empowerment.

During the Great War, the iconic red lipstick became paralleled with images of patriotism, photographs of women in munitions wearing that same red lipstick is just a taste of the power, these little wax sticks hold in each purse around the world.

Lipstick is far more than just another beauty product. What’s more important than the shade of the lipstick, are the people who wear them. These were their stories.

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